GRANDMA

ELIZABETH LINCOLN GOULD

Lena Emma
Lindsay
2142 Walnut
Bristol,
Penna

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/grandma0000eliz

GRANDMA

By

Elizabeth Lincoln Gould

Illustrated by

Mary Pemberton Ginther

The Penn Publishing
Company
1911

GRANDMA

By

Elizabeth Lincoln Gould

Illustrated by

Mary Pemberton Ginther

The Penn Publishing
Company
1911

COPYRIGHT
1911 BY
THE PENN
PUBLISHING
COMPANY

TO
THE MEMORY
OF
MY MOTHER

GRANDMA

CHAPTER I

MRS. SANDERSON lifted the knocker and let it fall with a clang that echoed down the lane, and startled a robin that had been enjoying the Sunday stillness. After a moment she stooped till her eyes were on a level with the keyhole.

"Key's on the inside, so she hasn't gone," murmured the visitor, as she lifted her head; "of course I knew she wouldn't 've; her last Sunday, and we've walked together to meeting for thirty years. But where is she, I'd like to be told? The door's always ajar if she isn't

right on hand. The first bell has stopped ringing; the other'll begin before we get there, and it doesn't ring but a few minutes before the organ starts in; I shouldn't have supposed she'd 've wanted to miss any of it, to-day of all days!"

Mrs. Sanderson's large face wore a look of bewilderment as she stood, irresolutely poised, with one foot on the ground and the other on the old door stone.

"Sally never has dizzy spells, like some of us," she said, addressing the knocker in a reproachful tone, "or else I might think she'd been seized with one, sudden, and had sat down somewhere, too weak to move. Where d'you s'pose she is?"

At that moment her ears caught a sound from the back of the house.

"That's the kitchen door," she said, and with an agility surprising in one of her weight, she ran around the corner of the house and knocked at the door before the key had fairly turned in its lock.

A small face with bright brown eyes, and cheeks that held the color of a winter apple,

appeared at the left hand window. The mouth took a humorous twist as Grandma Willis looked out at her friend, and the brows above the brown eyes were raised until they almost disappeared below the silvery hair which grew in little crisp waves and curls on her forehead. She motioned with her hand toward the door which led from the kitchen into the main part of the house, and then quickly pulled down the shade to match the one already lowered in the other window.

"Well, I declare, it's evident I'm not wanted in there," said Mrs. Sanderson, as she turned again toward the front of the house, "but Sally has some good reason, I'll warrant."

She had her foot on the threshold when the door opened, and Grandma Willis, key in hand, greeted her.

"I know how late 'tis, Molly," she said briskly, as Mrs. Sanderson stepped down to allow her to fit the key in the lock, "so don't you scold me, will you? The time has fled away ever since I got up this morning, and this last hour's gone quicker, even, than the rest. I've been sorting out my jellies, so when church is

over, you can all take 'em home, same as I planned at the sewing circle. They are out on the kitchen table, and they look real good. There are all kinds, beside what Jeddy Graham packed for me, yesterday."

Mrs. Sanderson's face worked in a curious way, as Grandma Willis put the key in her petticoat pocket, shook down and carefully smoothed her black skirt, and slid her hand through her friend's arm, bent to receive it.

"Don't seem as if I'd be able to eat a mite of it, good as 'tis," said Mrs. Sanderson in a tone that was almost a whimper. "I don't see however in this world I'm going to get through the winter without you, not to look ahead any further 'n that for trouble. I was reading out of the paper last night to father, and it said all signs pointed to a heavy winter; early cold, early snow, and plenty of it. You know what that means to me without you to lean on. I'll be housed till spring; I can dare as far as this by holding to the fence, but as for getting down the rest of the way to the main road, you know full well I can't risk it."

"You haven't got to risk it," said Grandma Willis. "I spoke with Jeddy about you yesterday, and he said he'd run his sleigh up to your house every Sunday morning, and take you to meeting and fetch you home again."

"What's he going to charge?" asked Mrs. Sanderson, stopping short in the road. "You know my circumstances, Sally."

"Certain I do," said her friend, "and they won't be cramped a mite by Jeddy. He's going to do it for love."

"Love o' what?" queried Mrs. Sanderson.

"Folks, I guess," said Grandma Willis. "Come, Molly, there's the second bell; you must spry up a little, if you can."

Although under stress of excitement Mrs. Sanderson could run, her ordinary gait when alone was a heavy lurch which took up a good deal of space and seemed to progress by curves; with the hand of Grandma Willis lying on the sleeve of her black silk dolman, just over the beaded rose which adorned its hem, Mrs. Sanderson was able to maintain a steady course, and when the friends had gained the church

green, they observed with satisfaction that there were several persons behind them. After one backward glance, they entered the church.

"Myra's tuned up on the organ," said the bell-ringer, a small man with a heavy felt hat pushed well down over his round head, till it rested securely just above his ears. "I usually yank once or twice after that, just till she gets the hang of the pedals. She's a good girl, Myra is, but she's never got what I should call the full control of her feet when it comes to pedals, now has she? I expect next Sunday you'll be hearing grand music. What denomination does your son hold to?"

"I'm not quite sure," said Grandma Willis. "I think he likes ours that he was brought up in, best of any, but his wife's a Universalist, I know, so I presume they take turns going with each other. Little Malcolm has a sweet voice, they tell me, and he sings with the boys' choir in the Episcopal, right close to where they live, Henry wrote me once."

"Come in, Sally," besought Mrs. Sanderson in a whisper. "What makes you gratify his curiosity so? I believe it's the breath of his

nostrils to ask questions and find out things, and then tell 'em 'round to everybody. He'll be saying your son's family are all mixed up in their beliefs, too. I could see it right in his eye."

"Supposing he does, what then?" asked Grandma Willis. "If you'd left me a minute longer I should have told him Dorothy goes to the Unitarian Sunday School because that's where her two best friends go. The cheapest present you can give Lem Todd is something to talk about. When I see him so peaked and eager, 'tisn't in my heart to deny him a little pleasure. Is my bonnet on straight? Your's is all right."

Up the aisle to the third pew from the front went the two friends, and with a last preliminary crash of the pedals, the organist began the voluntary. A moment later the minister opened the door close to the platform and seated himself in the central one of the three large chairs, with carved walnut backs and seats upholstered in crimson rep, which stood against the wall. The late comers rustled into their pews, the choir rose from behind the red curtain which

hid them from the congregation save when they were singing, and the service began.

When it was over, the minister stepped down the aisle to where Grandma Willis and Mrs. Sanderson stood, with most of the congregation gradually closing in around them.

"See here, Parson Briggs," said a stout man whose creaking up and down the aisle with the plate had proclaimed him a person of importance, "your text was a good one, and I've no fault to find with the sermon, but didn't you have Grandma Willis in mind considerable, off and on? There was once when I saw you look down at her, and seemed to me for a minute or two you couldn't think what you'd meant to say next — just for a minute. 'Twas when you were speaking of cups o' cold water, and I suspicioned you might be thinking of how many folks she'd given such cups to, and how 'twas likely to be some time before she had a chance to give us any more. She won't hear what you tell me — Susan Coombs is giving her the particulars of her grip attack, and Grandma's never one to keep an ear out for side talk."

"Brother Wilson, it is as you surmised,"

said the minister. "I was wondering whom the Lord would raise up among us to take her place."

"Well, now, I never considered He did that," said the stout man; "I never thought He calculated to provide folks to fill other folks's places, that is, not exactly. I always supposed He planned to let us miss 'em good and hard once in awhile, so we'd set to and realize our privileges better next time we had 'em."

The minister smiled but did not answer, for at the moment Grandma Willis broke away from the group around her and came toward him with both hands outstretched.

"I'm glad you gave me such a good sermon to go away on," she said warmly. "I expect I'm going to miss your preaching so I'll be real lonesome for home when Sunday mornings come around, and I remember how all the friends that I've known from a girl are gathered here, listening to you, and the choir's singing so pretty. Yes, Sunday will be a real hard day for me if I let myself get to thinking."

"You will hear fine preaching and music," said the minister as he held both the little hands

in one of his. "You will have great opportunities, Mrs. Willis."

"I've had them here," she told him. "I've had all I wanted, but I'm anticipating them down there, too, week days and Sundays both. You see my son and his family live in one of those apartment-houses where you have eight, nine, ten rooms, I don't know just how many, all on the same floor; and across an entry there's another family living just the same way, and there are four stories to the building. That makes eight families o' neighbors right under the same roof! Why, just think of the pleasant times they must have, all together, and I suppose they'll take me right in on account of my being Henry's mother. Henry was a great boy to make friends, and I don't believe he's changed much."

"I hope you will find everything just as you would like it," put in a serious-faced young woman who had come down from the organ loft.

Grandma Willis looked at her with twinkling eyes.

"Myra, do you want me to have such a good

time I'll be ready to stay right on and never come back?" she asked. "Or is it because you think 'twould make me homesick not to have something to straighten out, and I'd come home sooner? Here's my Sunday School class coming to say good-bye, the dear children — I don't know how I could make up my mind to leave them, if I didn't know how they'll love Mrs. Briggs. I'll just 'tend to them now, so's not to keep her waiting for them."

"They say you're going to-morrow, early," whispered one little girl with a thin, anxious face. "Oh, Grandma Willis, have you *got* to go?"

"Why, yes, dear child, there doesn't seem any other way out of it," said Grandma Willis, putting her arm around the little girl, while half a dozen more crowded close to catch every word. "My son's wife isn't well, and he has to be away ever so much — starts off to-morrow for two weeks, soon as I get there, and there's my little granddaughter Dorothy, 'bout as big as you, I guess, and my grandson Malcolm, size of Willy Simonds, I should judge, and they both need me, so their father says."

"Why haven't they ever been here?" asked a little girl from the edge of the group. "I should think they'd have wanted to come every summer, and holidays. I would, if I 's in their place."

"Well, dearie, you see you know me," and Grandma Willis made room for several more children, as the small questioner pressed closer, and clutched at the black skirt against the fold of which she had nestled for many happy Sundays in the old church vestry. "You know me and like me, but Dorothy and Malcolm, they're strangers to me, always having been to the seashore, or to their mother's folks. It's just happened that way. I'm hoping when we get acquainted they'll want to come here to Burford, when it's so I can be home again."

"Why don't their mother's folks look after them now?" demanded the child, rubbing her cheek against the beloved skirt, and looking up at the face of her Sunday School teacher with mingled sorrow and indignation. "'Tisn't fair for them to take you away from the folks that love you! My mother said —"

"Marg'ret —" came in a horrified voice, and a determined hand was outstretched to remove the small offender. "Why, Marg'ret Coburn!"

"She doesn't mean a bit o' harm," and Grandma Willis, stooping, kissed the little hot face, and whispered in the child's ear, "you come this afternoon, with the others, to get your potted slip, dearie; it's a geranium, yours is, with a mite of a pinky blossom; it's all marked with your name. 'Bout four o'clock, remember! I guess Mrs. Briggs is waiting now in the vestry. You let her see how well you know the lesson."

There was comfort in her voice, and little Margaret allowed herself to be drawn away by her mother, with the sure promise of the afternoon's pleasure. When all the good-byes had been said to the friends who lived outside the village, to the minister and his wife, and all the boys and girls who were not in her Sunday School class, Grandma Willis slipped her hand again through the arm of Mrs. Sanderson and they started for home, leaders of a short procession, followed by half a dozen neighbors who

were to divide among them the treasures of Grandma Willis's preserve cupboard.

"I declare," said Mrs. Coburn tearfully, as she received five jars of the plum jam for which Grandma Willis was famed through all the country-side, "I do declare, Grandma, I feel a good deal the way my Margaret does! When do you think you'll come back to us?"

"I don't know for sure," said Grandma Willis, "because I'll have to stay long as I'm needed. I should think 'most any nerves could be cured in a year, shouldn't you? Maybe I'll be back before you've really begun to look for me. Here, Mary Townsend, that chili sauce is yours; it's the kind you've always liked above all other sorts. Maybe I'll be back in time to make some for you next year."

"I was saying to Franklin, only this morning, that I guessed he'd miss Grandma Willis if he went to work and cut himself this winter with the axe the way he's always doing," said Mrs. Townsend as she received the chili sauce and a small round box; "and here you are providing me with your salve against just such times. Well I never!"

"I don't know what I shall do with Aunt Rachel if she gets one of her downhearted spells while you're gone, Grandma," said the youngest neighbor of them all. "Supposing she has one of those times when everything looks black to her, and she threatens to make away with herself, what shall I say to her?"

"You remind her she's promised to knit me one o' those thistle an' rose counterpanes o' hers, and have it ready when I come home," said Grandma Willis, patting the young woman's shoulder. "She's forgot one place in the pattern, she says, an' it'll make her so provoked, trying to remember it, she won't think about any of her imaginary troubles. I shall send her a picture card or something, real often. You keep your husband away from her much as you can, dear. He's one of the best men, but he doesn't know how to turn off trouble. You'll get on all right if you feed him up well, and urge him ou'-doors considerable."

When the neighbors had departed, with many last words, Grandma Willis locked her door once more, and went along the lane with her friend, for Mrs. Sanderson had bespoken her for Sun-

day dinner. There was a gradual rise in the lane till the Sanderson house, standing at its head, was reached. It was a large, cumbersome looking structure which bore a certain resemblance to Mrs. Sanderson's heavy figure, but in the doorway stood Mr. Hobart, her father, a brisk little old man who was so deaf that he had given up going to church save on "patriotic occasions." He had basted the roast at proper intervals, and kept a watchful guard over various dishes prepared in honor of the guest. He shook Grandma Willis's hand with great cordiality, and led her into the house.

He read her lips during the dinner, and answered her questions with scarcely a mistake. He followed his daughter and Grandma Willis to the kitchen when the meal was over, and insisted on helping with the work.

"I can put away things well as anybody," he said, and Grandma Willis nodded and smiled at him.

"Course you can," she said, moving her lips so that he could catch every word; "you're a splendid helper."

"He most always misplaces the silver," said

Mrs. Sanderson dolefully as the old man turned away; "but then he's over eighty-two, I don't know as it's to be wondered at. I'm only sixty-one, and I lose things now and then."

"You try and cheer up just a speck, to please me, for to-morrow morning, won't you, Molly?" said Grandma Willis, when the clock in the Sanderson kitchen struck the half hour after three. "I've got to run along home now, so's to be on hand when the children come for their plants, and the rest of the afternoon and evening I'll be setting things to rights. But you come along in the morning about seven, won't you? Jeddy'll be there with the depot wagon by half-past, and I'll want to hand over the key to you. Isn't it good I haven't any pets to leave? The Coburns have taken the kitten; she's so young she'll never notice the change, and you've got the hens and chickens. If my little dog was alive I don't know what I should do — but there, I make no doubt Henry's family would have found a place for him."

"I guess it's full as well he isn't living," said Mrs. Sanderson dubiously. "I'll be down by seven, maybe a mite earlier. I shall make up a

luncheon for you to eat on the cars. Starting off early that way, sets anybody's stomach all a-twitter. You don't know from experience, but I've been on the cars a good deal in past years, you recollect, before John died. Good-bye for now."

When the last little girl had received her plant from the kind old hands, and the ten children, standing in a row, had been kissed in turn, Margaret Coburn flung her arms around Grandma Willis's neck and clung there.

"You're *our* grandma," she said fiercely; "don't you be grandma to everybody down there, same as here! Don't you! You're our grandma! You don't belong to them. You belong to us!"

"Why, yes, dearie, of course this is where I belong," said Grandma Willis, smoothing the tumbled hair. "This is my home, and always has been. Maybe the folks down in the city won't think of me as grandma. Maybe they won't at all."

"They will, too — why won't they?" and Margaret raised a tear-stained, indignant face for a moment, quickly burying it again from

sight. "*Course* they will!" came in muffled tones.

"They won't take me away from my home folks," said Grandma Willis firmly.

She unclasped the clinging arms, and set Margaret down on the ground, keeping one little hand in hers.

"Come," she said, smiling at the row of children, all on the verge of tears, "come, I'll walk to the end of the lane with you, and then you all say good-bye once more, and scamper off without looking back. That's the way to do."

CHAPTER II

IT was a still, dark world to which Grandma Willis awoke next morning. She shivered a little as she dressed in her bedroom on the ground floor, near the warmth of the kitchen.

"I 'most wish I'd left a fire last night," she said to herself, "for there's a real chill in the air — well, it's time, I s'pose. November's 'most here. I wouldn't wonder if we had a white Thanksgiving. I can invite — my stars! I'm not going to be here!"

For a moment Grandma Willis stood gazing at her reflection, dimly shown by her candle in

the little blurred mirror that hung over her bureau. There was a much better glass in the living-room; she gathered up her dress skirt and her collar and brooch with one hand and carried them and the candle into the living-room.

"I do look real scared in there," she said with a little tremulous laugh. "It's the light, maybe, or lack of it. I couldn't afford to talk much to Molly, if I had such a face when she came. I must 'tend to it, right off."

She rubbed her cheeks until a glow came into them, and then set about getting her simple breakfast on a little oil stove.

"The fire would have been one more thing for poor Molly to worry over," she murmured; "and there's just enough oil in this stove to serve me. Wait till I've had my cup o' coffee, I'll be all heartened up, then; this old bread's just right for toasting, too, and three slices are my regular pattern. I've planned real well not to have a lot of stuff that nobody wants, left over — and I never had it to do before, either. Dear me, there's the clock striking six this minute!"

Her breakfast over, she set the kitchen in order, and then put her little bedroom to rights. After that she made a tour of the rooms and the closets to see if by chance any spot or corner had been neglected.

Coming slowly down the short flight of stairs that led up to the chambers where many a poor and weary guest had rested, she stood on the lowest step, looking helplessly at the row of nails on the entry wall, where her shawl and hat and jacket were wont to hang.

Only one thing hung there now — an old black felt hat, a man's hat, worn, but free from any fleck of dust. Grandma Willis gazed at it, then she hurried across the little entry and took it down from its nail, folding it quickly together.

"Where's there a piece o' paper?" she said under her breath. "I thought I'd leave it where it's always hung since 'Bijah went away, but I can't. I've got to take it. Where's there a piece o' paper — before Molly gets here. I don't want to have any talk over it."

She found a piece of soft white paper suited to her need, and wrapping the old hat in it, she

tumbled everything out of her carefully packed bag, and laid the white paper parcel in the bottom of it. She was repacking the bag with swift fingers when the kitchen door opened and Mrs. Sanderson entered. If she fancied her face was more cheerful than it had been the afternoon before, she was sadly mistaken; it wore an expression of settled gloom which was far from encouraging.

Grandma Willis, however, took no apparent heed of this pall, but filled the half hour before Jeddy Graham's arrival with cheery talk and advice as to what her friend had best do in the way of looking after the old house, left to itself for the first time in forty years.

"I've pulled up all the shades so the sun can get in and keep the must out," said Grandma Willis, "and you've no need to give them a thought. The blinds are all fastened back, secure, and there isn't a loose pane anywhere. Don't you go up the stairs and maybe twist your ankle coming down; I wouldn't — and don't feel obliged to come look in the downstairs windows every day, Molly. There isn't a thing could happen to the old house. You

just give it a glance when you're going by, for my sake, so you can write me how the snow's banked round it, and so on. I shall like to picture it out."

"I'll do just as you say," and Mrs. Sanderson's expression was that of one from whom all joy had departed. "It'll be the only comfort I have."

"Oh, no, 'twon't," said Grandma Willis. "You'll have a sight o' good times this coming winter. I heard three — four of the folks say they planned to get 'round to see you real often."

"You've engaged 'em to do it," quavered Mrs. Sanderson. "You've put away your things from the entry nails," she added as her desolate gaze rested for a moment on the wall seen through the open door. "Have you packed 'em in camphor?"

"Those that needed it, I have," said Grandma Willis briskly. "Isn't that the rattle o' Jeddy's wagon? Now, Molly, you help me into my jacket, and I'll get off soon as I can. That my nice luncheon you promised me?"

"Yes, I'll put it in your bag," said Mrs.

Sanderson, and with a heavy sigh she placed the box, which had been held tightly in her hands, beside the little worn purse and the spectacle case, and snapped the clasp of the bag.

Five minutes later she stood on the door-stone, a picture forlorn enough to win pity from a stranger, but waving a limp handkerchief in response to a crisp one waved from Jeddy Graham's wagon, at the foot of the lane.

"You wouldn't call her an image o' joy, this morning, would ye?" inquired Jeddy, who had looked back and described a circle in the air with his whip. "I'll wager she don't feel a mite worse'n I do, but anybody in my line o' business has got to keep a smiling face no matter what happens. Did you notice the extra polish I got on old Bess in honor o' your going away?"

"Indeed I do notice it," said Grandma Willis. "I don't expect to see any better looking horses than yours, if as good, while I'm gone."

The next half hour was like a strange, unbelievable dream to the unwonted traveller. At the end of it she heard, as through a wall,

the sound of Jeddy's good-bye and the shriek of the engine.

"I've started!" she thought in sudden fright. "I didn't really believe 'twould happen, but it has! I've started!"

She sat in a panic, her breath coming fast, her eyes looking through a mist at the flying woods. On and on and on flew the train; the dull pounding of its wheels filled her ears with insistent noise. At last another sound penetrated her consciousness; it came from the seat behind her, and it was repeated again and again. Grandma Willis lost the pounding of the wheels for a moment, and listened to the other sound. She reached for her bag and unclasped it. From one of its pockets she took a small white envelope bound about with a rubber strap. She removed the band, gave the envelope a shake and turned in her seat. For a moment it seemed a part of her strange, unbelievable dream that the man behind her presented an unknown face with piercing eyes under shaggy, frowning brows. Then the sound came again, and Grandma Willis forgot everything but his need and her remedy.

"You take these," she said, as she leaned over and laid the envelope on a book which was open on his lap. "They won't hurt you; it's my own hoarhound, and one drop will stop that peppery, tickling feeling so you won't have it again for quite a spell; next time it comes you take another. I have a plenty more in my trunk. You've had the grip, I guess. Take one right now," she urged him.

The sharp eyes searched her face for a moment before the man touched the envelope. Then the strangling cough came again, and he hastily inserted his thumb and forefinger, extracting a drop, clear golden brown and round as a little marble. Between his contorted lips he slipped Grandma Willis's hoarhound, and it worked its simple charm. She nodded and smiled at him, well satisfied, and turned back, less frightened and unhappy than before. She even thought the pounding of the wheels had a hopeful sound.

"Maybe 'tisn't going to be so hard," she thought. "I guess there'll be folks that'll want other things besides hoarhound. The city's full o' folks."

"Would you like to read the paper?" came by and by in a deep voice, and once more she turned to meet the sharp eyes of the stranger.

"I don't believe I'll try to, thank you," she told him. "My reading specs have sunk 'way to the bottom of my bag by this time. I didn't expect to use 'em; I expected to enjoy looking out the windows, but things go by 'most too fast. While I'm thinking, 'Is that a horse or a cow off there on that hill-top?' I find I'm looking mostly at a sand bank and a row o' telegraph poles. You'd hardly believe it, I s'pose, but I haven't been on the cars but twice before in my life, and both o' those times long ago, and I'm all but sixty-nine years old. Don't you think travelling's pretty lonesome work?"

The man gave a short laugh which changed to a cough, and he hastily took another hoarhound drop.

"That's right," she approved, "don't you try to talk much; you ought not to rasp that throat o' yours any more'n you can help. Maybe you'd rather I'd take the paper, and look at the pictures, and keep still. Would you rather?"

There was a suspicion of amusement in the sharp eyes as the man shook his head, his hand at his throat. There was no one in the opposite seats; there were, in fact, not more than half a dozen persons in the car.

"Talk away," said the man when he could speak; "I've come through from the edge of Canada without hearing anyone say a word — except the brakeman. "Have you relatives along the road you are planning to visit, or what takes you away from home?"

Grandma Willis was by no means garrulous, but in her sudden and bewildering loneliness, she felt the need of speech. Her heart warmed to this chance acquaintance, and she resented his blunt question no more than a child would have done. She turned so far around that she could face her neighbor, and began her story.

"I'm going to stay with my son Henry and his family in the city in the apartment house where they live," she told him. "I haven't seen her since they were married and came to Burford on their wedding journey, 'most thirteen years ago. There are two grandchildren, and I've never seen them; think o' that!"

"It's something to think of, surely," said the man. "How has it happened?"

"Why, of course, it's been spoken of, that I should visit them," said Grandma Willis, "but some way we never got 'round to it. And as for their coming to me, why, seems as though the hill air is too bracing for Louise — that's her name — and I s'pose she's never wanted the children away from her. That's the way I've figured it out in my mind. Henry has come to see me five, six times, and stopped over night, but he's a busy man, and doesn't have much leisure for visiting way up country where I live."

"I see," said the man as she looked at him, bespeaking comprehension. "The city is an exacting master, hard to get away from, even for a day. What is your son's business?"

Grandma Willis puckered her forehead in perplexity, but her eyes met his frankly.

"I don't know as I've heard just the name of it, ever," she said, "but it's like this — if folks have something they want to do, like building a railroad, or starting a new town, or getting an invention into use, they hire Henry to talk about it to other folks that have the money

to help it on — and Henry 'most always persuades them, I guess. Of course 'twould have to be good honest things and plans, or Henry'd never speak up for them. He's just like his father, my husband, about that."

"Your husband is not living?" queried the man.

"He died 'most twenty-five years ago," said Grandma Willis.

She turned to look at the bag lying close beside her, and putting down her hand drew it closer still.

"I've never got used to it," she said, "to 'Bijah's going, I mean. When it came to Henry's writing me that his wife's nerves had given out, and they needed me, seemed as if I'd got to talk it over with 'Bijah before I decided — but there! the only way to decide was just the way I did! When you're needed, why, that settles it."

"I see your point," said the man, nodding, and if there were any suggestions of irony in his voice, Grandma Willis failed to catch them. "Your son, I take it, is a promoter."

"That's the word our minister used, I re-

member now," said Grandma Willis. "My husband, Henry's father, was a promoter, too, in our little town. Why, when they wanted a bell for the church, 'Bijah was the one that went 'round with the subscription paper, and laughed and talked everybody into giving something — and when the Dunham sisters were burned out, 'twas 'Bijah that worked till there was money raised to start them again in the millinery business. And so it went. Henry likes folks, same as his father did, and he can get on with them. Why, when he's come to see me we've had the best times! He'd always bring the children's latest pictures to show me, and his wife's. He never had his own taken. He used to say he didn't appear natural with his mouth shut," and Grandma Willis looked hopefully at her fellow-traveller, watching for a smile.

"Quite a joker, I see," said the man, but he did not really smile, to her disappointment. His photograph could have been made natural without the difficulty which Henry had encountered, she thought.

"I wish I had some o' the pictures to

show you," she said after a minute's pause; "they're beautiful, all of them. One Christmas they sent me a group, Louise and the two children, but I never expected any of the others. I had that framed. Nowadays,— probably you know, but I didn't till Henry told me — city folks don't have two, three dozen taken and send them 'round; they go to some man or woman that charges from three dollars up, for a single picture, and sometimes they pay as high as twelve dollars, just for one, Henry told me. And instead of having on your best Sunday dress and your hair done extra careful, they rumple up some kind of material that looks all shadowy in the picture, and they muss your hair up, and then you stand with your head turned away, or else you sit looking down at your hands, or off somewhere, and your features aren't clear. Have you seen that kind?"

"I have," said the man, and took a third hoarhound drop.

"In Burford, William Jennings takes our pictures looking right out at you, and you couldn't mistake one of us," and Grandma Willis gave her little silvery tinkle of a laugh.

"I haven't heard anything like that for years," and the man smiled in spite of himself.

But Grandma Willis was thinking of the Burford photographs. Her laugh was such an old story to her and all her friends.

"I s'pose not," she said; "I think likely you live in the city?"

"I do, worse luck," said the man; "and by the way, we are nearly at the junction where they serve luncheon. What can I get you to eat?"

"Nothing," said Grandma Willis. "You didn't s'pose Burford folks would let me come off unprovided, did you? You don't know them, that's certain. Molly Sanderson, who's been nearest neighbor to me for thirty years, has given me enough for a family o' six, to judge by the box. You wait and see."

She took the box from her bag, untied its string and opened it.

"Look!" she said, and displayed the top layer to the man behind her.

"Doughnuts!" he said with a note of interest; "not the restaurant kind, but the old-fashioned twisted. They look good."

"They are good as good can be," said Grandma Willis. "I know Molly Sanderson's cooking, of old."

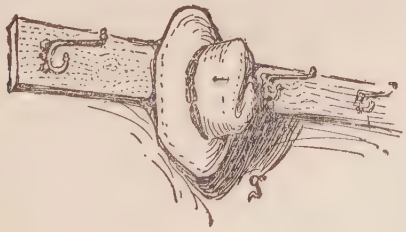
Then she turned square around in her seat.

"If that man in the linen coat could bring another of those little tables such as he set up for those folks to play their game on," she said, nodding her head toward the far end of the car, "I'd invite you to luncheon, same as if I were at home. Could he do it? and will you? My name is Mrs. Sally Willis."

"He could, and I will, with pleasure," said the man.

He rose and bowed to her.

"I am Judge Holcomb, at your service, madam," he said. "Porter, bring us a table at once."



CHAPTER III

THREE o'clock was the hour set for the train to arrive in the city, but an accident to another train delayed the travellers for nearly two hours; dusk had crept into the car where Grandma Willis sat, her bag tightly clasped in both hands, her bright eyes fixed on the smoky sky against which lights began to glimmer, when the hand of her new friend touched her shoulder.

"We shall be in now, in about ten minutes," said the Judge. "Here is my card, Mrs. Willis; if anything should come up that makes you wish to see me, drop me a line to that address."

Grandma Willis turned a startled face toward him as she took the card.

"Why, you'll see Henry," she said; "he's coming to meet me! He'll urge you to come visit us, of course. He'll want you to drop 'round to supper any night it's convenient. He'll be grateful as can be to you for making my journey so pleasant — and he likes folks, Henry does."

But the judge shook his head, and it seemed to Grandma Willis as if his face had settled back into heavy, unsmiling lines.

"I'm not given to visits," he said shortly, "but I'll come at any time if you need me," he added.

Grandma Willis was puzzled by his manner, but she had little time to think about it, for in a moment the porter came along, and brushed and dusted her and her garments with great energy until a minute before the train slid into the long railroad station.

"Thank you," said Grandma Willis, smiling up into his black face, "you're real kind."

The porter, having received a liberal tip from the judge, showed his gleaming teeth in

a broad smile, as he seized her bag in one hand and Judge Holcomb's in the other.

"Where's he going with our things?" asked Grandma Willis. "I wouldn't lose that bag for anything in this world!"

"You won't lose it," and the judge piloted her safely out to the platform.

She had thought the delay in her arrival might have made some trouble about her son's meeting her, but the glad cry she gave at the moment of the train's stopping relieved the judge of that anxiety, if of no other.

"There's Henry!" she cried, and in another breath she was clinging to the arm of a big, good-looking man who bent his head to kiss her.

"Oh, Henry!" she said, "if I'm not glad to see you! It would have seemed a terrible long journey to me if it hadn't been for this gentleman; Judge Holcomb, may I make you acquainted with my son Henry. Why, do you two know each other? I didn't know you had met."

For her clear eyes were amazed at what they saw: her son with averted gaze and a dull red

flush in his cheeks; Judge Holcomb lifting his hat with a cold, unfriendly courtesy.

"I have met your son, once," said the judge; "a good while ago — only once; I was not quite sure of it when you first spoke of him. Mr. Willis, I trust you will take the best possible care of your mother, during her stay. Remember, she comes from the pure air of the hills, the atmosphere of the city will be trying to her, at its best."

Grandma Willis turned from one to the other in bewilderment; from her son, with that half shamed, half defiant look on his face, to the judge, her new friend, with his air of frozen courtesy. At the moment the judge's face changed, as he held out his hand to her.

"I thank you for a delightful day," he said. "I shall never forget it; remember I am yours to command at any time," and releasing her hand and lifting his hat, he was gone.

"Why," faltered Grandma Willis, "why, what —"

But her son shook himself as one who casts off unwelcome thoughts, and pulled her hand through his arm.

"Never mind him, mother," he said in his ordinary tone, loud and cheerful; "he's one of the high-up, stand-off kind of men that haven't any use for a plain fellow like me. I've got a carriage here for you. Where's your trunk-check? We'll talk going up to the house, for as soon as we get there I must finish packing to go off on the six-thirty train."

"Won't Louise see to it that your packing's all done?" asked Grandma Willis. "I s'pose she's too sick to do it herself, but you have two hired girls, haven't you?"

Her son chuckled, as he took her to a big window where he handed her check to a young man and gave him an address, repeating it in quick incisive tones.

"I'd like to see one of our 'hired girls' doing my packing," he said as he led his mother out of the station and put her into a carriage, the driver of which touched his hat with his whip as Mr. Willis nodded to him. "I'd have to hire a valet for that sort of work; one of the maids packs for Louise, I believe, when she takes a trip, or goes away for the summer."

"How is Louise?" asked Grandma Willis,

sitting very straight in the luxurious carriage. "I'm glad to have this opportunity of asking you, Henry. Does she sit up at all? I hope she hasn't made any special effort for me, to-day. I've been thinking ever since your letter came about the things I hoped she'd let me do for her, like making her bed, and doing her mending, and reading to her — all such things so she wouldn't have to have hired help close 'round in her room; when we're sick-abed, we like to have our folks with us, and I've had a good deal of experience."

Her son put his hand up to cover his mouth for a moment, but when he spoke it was with sufficient gravity.

"You won't find Louise in bed, mother," he said, "in fact, you won't find her at all. She stopped in at the office about four, after I'd telephoned her the train was delayed, and from there she went to a tea, and to her milliner — I think it was the milliner she said. She thought, however, she'd get home before I have to leave."

He looked at his little mother's puzzled face, and burst into a laugh.

"You can't understand it, can you?" he asked, and then his laughter stopped. "I couldn't, at first," he said,— "there never was much talk in Burford about nerves when I was growing up. I don't know as they were ever mentioned, but they're pretty common here in the city nowadays. You'll find out how they work before you've been in the house twenty-four hours. Louise will pay for to-day's good time, to-morrow."

Grandma Willis laid her hand on his arm.

"Does she have spells?" she asked. "Is that the way of it?"

Henry's mouth was twisted in several curves before he answered.

"Well, yes," he said at last, "as near that as anything. We're almost at The Welford. Good broad street, isn't it?"

Grandma Willis looked out of the window, and her face brightened.

"There are trees, Henry!" she cried. "I didn't suppose there would be, not where folks are crowded together so."

"That's the park," said her son, watching her closely as she looked out of the window, for-

getful of him for a moment in her joy at the trees. "There's an entrance to it right opposite The Welford; you can go in there and walk whenever you like; pretty good imitation of country it is, too."

"Maybe the children will show me 'round it," said Grandma Willis hopefully. "I'm anticipating some good times with them when Louise can spare them to me," she added hastily. "I don't ever believe in a grandma trying to step in alongside o' the mother."

"Here we are," said Henry, and his voice carried a note of relief to the quick ears of his mother.

"You got all tired out waiting for me," she said; "it's a shame, boy! You lie right down on the lounge and rest you for as long as you can, when we get up to your house, and I won't even talk to you."

Like one in a dream she saw the big door of The Welford swing open, held by a boy in a gray suit with many gilt buttons; saw another boy in a small square room the wrought iron door of which he closed when she and her son were well inside it.

"This is an elevator, I know," she whispered, from her seat on a comfortably cushioned bench. "Well, Henry, doesn't it go up easy? But I could have walked up those beautiful marble steps just as well. I s'pose, though, you like to ride folks up in it every chance you get," she said smiling at the boy as he slid the door open for his passengers to step out; "it must be real fun for you; I s'pose you let the other boy have his turn once in awhile, don't you?"

The elevator boy had a round, impertinent face, and for a moment he stared at his questioner in spite of the frown bent on him by Henry Willis. Then, suddenly, something in the friendly eyes of the newcomer touched his heart to warmth.

"I like it better than the other boy does," he said respectfully enough to satisfy the frowning man and please Grandma Willis.

"That's good, long as it's your work," she said. "Thank you. I'll probably see you real often; what shall I call you?"

"My name's Jim Halloran," said the boy as he shot the door across.

"Jim Halloran — I'll remember," and Grandma Willis nodded a good-bye to him. "He appears to be a real nice boy," she said. "Does Malcolm like him, or is Malcolm a mite too young?"

"Now see here, mother," said the man as he guided her over the slippery polished floor to an elaborately panelled and brass-trimmed door, "you mustn't talk to all the people who are employed about the building in that familiar way; if you do, they'll take advantage of it, and of you."

Grandma Willis stopped short and looked up at him, frank amazement and reproach in her eyes.

"I don't believe they would, Henry, ever," she said simply. "They'll all see I'm just an old country woman, and that I don't know but one way to talk to folks, and they'll make allowances. I don't believe anybody'll be saucy to me. But I'll try not to talk too much to them, if you're afraid."

"Oh, no matter, say whatever you like, if you don't mind the consequences," and her son flung open the door, and gently pushed her before

him into what seemed to her pitchy darkness. "Wait — stay where you are until I've turned on the light. I'd like to know where that lazy Cecilia is."

As he spoke a flood of light responded to his pressure of a button, and coming toward them from an inner room was a young person quite different from anyone ever seen before by Grandma Willis. She had a small pale face, elaborately dressed hair, an impudent little tip-tilted nose, a neat figure in a short black gown, with ruffled apron; on her head was a tiny square of white, set cornerwise, and on her feet were high heeled shoes with shining buckles. Grandma Willis looked at her with mixed wonder and delight. It seemed, however, that her son was not so well pleased as she with the sudden appearance of this jaunty young person.

"Oh, you're here, Cecilia," he said in a half apologetic tone; "isn't it a little after the usual time for lighting up?"

"I hadn't noticed the time, sir," remarked Cecilia.

There was no hint of disrespect in her voice,

but her words seemed to leave a good deal to be desired or explained, Grandma Willis thought. When the maid turned toward her, the guest, however, her lips parted in an agreeable if rather condescending smile.

"Mrs. Willis left orders for me to show Madam Willis to her room," she said in her even, low-pitched voice. "I will take her bag, sir."

Henry Willis released the bag, which she took in a hand whose whiteness the visitor's quick eyes could not fail to note.

"This way, Madam Willis, please," she said, with another smile, and turning, she walked jauntily across the square hall, and down a short entry to a room where a bright light was burning, Grandma Willis following her meekly, after one beseeching glance at her son.

"Is there anything you wish, madam?" inquired Cecilia, her hand on the door-knob.

Grandma Willis looked about her with a dazed air, but as she saw the door slowly but steadily closing in the hands of the capable Cecilia, she clutched at remembrance.

"Yes, there's one thing," she said, with dig-

nity. "I'd like a cup of tea for myself, and one for my son, if you please, in about ten minutes, soon as I've washed my face and hands and smoothed my hair a little bit. We both need it. I'll be out to take it with my son, in the dining-room, or wherever you say."

"I will serve it in the parlor," said Cecilia; she stepped into the room again. "Would you like me to unpack your bag, madam?"

"No, my dear, I shouldn't," and Grandma Willis put her hand on her bag, as if to guard her treasure from the touch of sacrilege.

Cecilia closed the door softly, and she was left alone for the first time since Mrs. Sanderson had entered the old Burford kitchen early that morning. She rubbed her eyes, and then, unclasping her bag, her hand slipped down until she felt the carefully wrapped parcel at its bottom.

"I must get a fresh handkerchief," she said with resolute cheerfulness, and drew a spotless square from one of the pockets of the bag, "and then I'll step right in there where I see the water faucets. Little dressing-room, all complete, isn't it?"

She had long since fallen into the habit, so comforting to those who live alone, of talking things over with herself. Mrs. Sanderson who, through her father's presence, was not reduced to this expedient, had once stood half an hour on the Willis door-stone, listening for the voice of her friend's visitor, and discovering her mistake at last, had been moved to remonstrance.

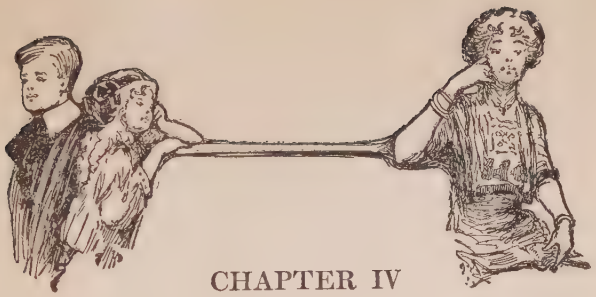
"Maybe 'tis foolish," Grandma Willis had responded, laughing, "but I don't mind if 'tis, Molly, not a mite!"

Now, as she surveyed her new domain, she began to talk to herself, softly.

"All complete," she murmured again; "there doesn't seem to be a thing left to wish for, does there? Well, well!" She looked out into the other room, where the curtains were closely drawn, and the lights were burning brightly. "I wonder what's to be seen out o' those windows; maybe more folks living near as near; maybe trees; I guess I won't look now, for if it's folks, it might make me lonesome; maybe it's trees."

She turned to the bathroom again, and bent to examine the faucets, gleaming like silver.

"Isn't it wonderful," she breathed. "There was never but one person in Burford called madam; that was old Squire Hale's mother; she was 'most ninety. I wonder if I look as old as that, or most as old to Cecilia — maybe I do. I guess living among your home folks, you don't know how old you do look. Well, anyway, I can wash the dust and cinders off me, and I'll do it this minute!"



CHAPTER IV

WHEN Grandma Willis stepped out of her room a few minutes later, she stood on the threshold, uncertain which way to go, until her ear caught the sound of strumming on a piano. There was no suggestion of melody, but she smiled as if she had heard the strains of a delightful song.

"That's Henry playing his same chords that he learned when he's a boy," she said, hurrying toward the sound. "He used to say they'd go with 'most any tune folks wanted to sing. You don't seem to be lying on the lounge as I advised you, nor yet packing," she said gleefully as she entered the parlor and went up close to her son. "You want me to help you pack?"

"It's all done," said the man; "I had most

of it done before I went out, and I've thrown the rest of the things in, so I shouldn't lose any time when I might be visiting with you. Ever hear these chords before?" and he played them again with the pedal working hard, laughing up at her as she stood beside him. "I don't dare do this when Dorothy's at home; and there's her ring at the door; I know it; she puts her finger on the button and keeps it there till somebody comes."

"Shall I go let her in?" asked Grandma Willis, starting eagerly toward the door.

Her son put out one hand and caught at her skirt, while the other hand played three defiant chords as a finale to his musical performance.

"She wouldn't know what to make of it," he said. "Cecilia's here to answer the bell — when she gets good and ready."

Cecilia's little heels clicked along the hall from the region of the kitchen, and she opened the door.

"Where were you, Cecilia?" demanded a child's voice. "You are *very* slow."

"Madam Willis has arrived, Miss Dorothy,"

was Cecilia's only reply, vouchsafed in a calm tone.

There was a whispered, "Oh, I forgot!" and then, "Smooth out my skirt, Cecilia. Do I look all right?" while the man twirling on the piano stool laughed.

"She's her mother right over again," he muttered. "Come in, Dorothy, here's your grandmother. Give her a good kiss and tell her you're glad to see her."

In all her life Grandma Willis had never seen such a fairy child as the one who came to greet her, floating across the parlor floor as if she were a bit of thistle down, blown by a summer breeze.

"Let me feel of you, dearie, and see if you're real," said Grandma Willis; and the admiration in her eyes was so evident that Dorothy submitted to her caress without displeasure, and even laid her cool lips on the soft wrinkled cheek, to her grandmother's joy.

"I've just come from dancing school," she said, "and it was a special afternoon, so I wore my best dress. Do you like it?"

"Why, it's beautiful, dearie; you stand off

and turn around slow, so I can take it all in," said Grandma Willis. "Shines 'most like frost, don't it? and all those little posies catching it up here and there! Why, you look as if you belonged top of a Christmas tree, or peeking out of the branches. Did you have a good time at your dancing school?"

"Yes, I did," and Dorothy nodded emphatically. "I had the most partners of anyone; there's a bag full of favors I got, out in the hall."

"Favors!" echoed her grandmother with a puzzled face.

"She means all kinds of foolish trinkets the boys give the girls in the dances," explained her father. "Dorothy, come here a minute. Don't you think it would be polite for you to ask your grandmother if she had a pleasant journey, when she's come a long way, and you've never seen her before?"

Dorothy leaned against her father's knee, quite unabashed by this reproof.

"I forgot," she said. "Did you have a pleasant journey, grandmother?"

"Why, yes, I did," and Grandma Willis

smiled at the recollection. "I got acquainted with a gentleman on the train, and he was nice as could be to me."

She hesitated, and then with an impulse of loyalty to the stranger who had lightened her loneliness, she added:

"Judge Holcomb was his name, and I guess he's full as old as I am."

"I know his granddaughter," said Dorothy; "she goes to my school. He lives all alone in a great big house on the avenue. His wife has died and both his sons have died, and only his daughter — that's my friend's mother — is left, and she's very delicate; it isn't her nerves, it's something different. Once in awhile they go to his house for dinner. He has a butler. Father, I wish we had a butler."

"I don't see where we could stow him away when he wasn't at work," said her father. "He'd have to stand up in some corner all night, Dorothy. Here comes Cecilia with tea and cakes. Why, this is a party, in honor of your grandmother's coming and my going away; which reminds me I haven't much time left."

As Cecilia set the tray down on one of the small tables, of which there were half a dozen scattered about the room, Dorothy fluttered over to it and took a round frosted cake from a rose-colored plate.

"These are the best cakes Nora makes," she said, and bit daintily into the frosting. "It's too late to serve tea, Cecilia, didn't you know it?"

"Any time up to six o'clock is proper, Miss Dorothy," came in the maid's level tones. "I think Mrs. Willis would prefer not to have you eat more than one cake."

Grandma Willis looked on in dismay. Such a breach of good-manners as that shown by her little fairy granddaughter would have caused a Burford mother to blush with shame. But Henry was not a Burford mother, and evidently saw no occasion for either blush or reproof. He chuckled instead, as the second cake found its way after the first, while Grandma Willis sipped her tea, in considerable disturbance of mind. Just as Dorothy stretched her hand for the third time toward the plate of cakes, there came a sharp ring at the bell.

"Don't tell that I had two, will you, grandmother?" whispered Dorothy, and she seated herself close beside Grandma Willis, and folded her hands in her lap. "Do you think I might have one of the sandwiches?" she asked clearly as the door was opened and she heard the swish of her mother's gown. "May I have one, grandmother?"

"She's been neglected," thought Grandma Willis, as she set down her tea-cup, and rose to greet her daughter-in-law. "Louise hasn't looked after her manners, nor her truth-telling, I'm afraid — but there, I suppose it's on account of having so many other things, and her nerves. Of course she can't look carefully after everything."

"I was *so* sorry not to be here when you arrived," came from the doorway, as Mrs. Willis, tall, slender, and fair as her little daughter, stood on the threshold for an instant, before entering the room.

Grandma Willis, as she received a peck first on one cheek, then on the other, while her hand was held well above the height dictated by Burford cordiality, had a feeling that during the

pause on the threshold she had been thoroughly inspected from head to foot.

"And I forgot to take off my rubbers from the time I ran out to look at the garden," she thought. "Never mind, I guess she finds more'n that out o' the way."

"I hope you've been made comfortable," said her daughter-in-law. "Did Cecilia do everything for you? I know Henry is a host in himself. I'm sorry it's so nearly time for you to go, Henry, but the milliner was most trying. I think I shall give her up. Dorothy, go right to your room and have Cecilia take off that dress; you know it is altogether too delicate to wear about the house. Was the journey terribly tiresome? You may stay, Dorothy, till your father goes."

"She don't seem to call me anything," thought Grandma Willis. "I was hoping she'd call me mother, long as she's never had one of her own since a child. Maybe she will, after awhile."

"Why no, dear," she said aloud, "'twas real pleasant. I made a friend on the way, and that always helps along."

"Yes?" said her daughter-in-law, indifferently. "I hope you will enjoy being here; it will be a great relief to me not to be left utterly alone with the care of the children, as I always am when Henry goes away, and of course the city will be a delightful change to you, after your being buried up there in Burford so long."

Grandma Willis felt the surge of indignation and amazement, and the color deepened in her cheeks, but she held her tongue.

"They don't any of them understand," she told herself, and while she hunted for comfort, there came a welcome interruption.

There was a bumping sound from the outer hall, and the jingle of a bunch of keys. The door opened with a bang, and stamping through it came a short, red-cheeked, gray-eyed boy.

"Here's a man with a trunk," he announced. "I suppose it's — why, hello, Grandma Willis! I forgot you were coming, but I'm awful glad to see you!"

"Malcolm, don't walk all over my gown, and then strangle your poor grandmother," chided Mrs. Willis. "And haven't I told you never to say hello to a lady? I'm sure I don't know

what she will think of you, and your training."

But Grandma Willis had put her hands on the shoulders of the boy, and held him tight, searching his face with eager eyes.

"Henry," she said, turning to her son, who had seated himself again on the piano stool and was softly striking his chords, "why didn't you tell me? You never told me about Malcolm — why, I've got a picture of 'Bijah, when he was ten years old, that he gave me when we were married."

The sweet old voice faltered, for gazing straight into hers were eyes, like those the beaver felt had shaded long ago, crystal clear and honest as the sun.

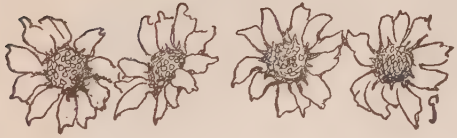
Mrs. Willis rose with an embarrassed air; she was not fond of emotions. Dorothy went over to her father.

"What does she mean? What's the matter?" she questioned.

But Malcolm, who understood no more than they, drew from a bulging pocket a large, grayish crumpled something.

"Here, grandma," he said, "you cry right

into my handkerchief; never mind where yours is. I bet you're all tired out, and hungry, same as I am. Seems as if anybody might starve before it's dinner time in this house. What's tea and cakes? Nothing!"



CHAPTER V

STRANGE dreams visited Grandma Willis that night, when at last she fell asleep. The evening, begun with her son's departure before the late dinner, had proved a disquieting one for her. At one moment she felt that her daughter-in-law was really an invalid, in need of care; the next moment she seemed possessed of such energy and ambition that no thought of illness could be connected with her.

"I'll straighten things out in my mind when I get to bed," Grandma Willis had thought. "Louise isn't contented nor happy, I can see that, but I can't make out what's the trouble."

Sleep overtook her before anything was "straightened out." In her weariness she for-

got to wind her watch. When she woke in her darkened room, she lay listening for sounds which might help her to guess the time, and gazing at the curtain, as it blew in and out against the window she had opened the night before.

"I'll slip on my wrapper and just take a peep out," she thought, "then if it should happen to be the Park opposite, I could leave the shade up."

"It's the Park!" she breathed joyously, as a careful raising of one corner of the curtain, showed her trees, across the broad street. "Why, there goes a man on horseback. Mercy me! I've overslept. It must be real late. Just see how light it is! And I told Louise I'd like to have my breakfast with the children, 'long as she takes hers in her room. I've got to hurry."

She dressed with all possible haste, in the little print gown she had laid out the night before, after much deliberation. It was a black and white stripe with a tiny purple flower sprinkled over its surface, and was finished with a narrow frill of lace at the neck

and sleeves; around the neck under the frill she drew a soft black ribbon, tied it in a bow, and pinned it securely with her second-best brooch, a moss-agate. Her cheeks held their bright color and her eyes under the wavy white hair were shining with interest and excitement.

"Here's another day begun," she said as she stepped out of her room. "Why, I guess I'm not late; I hear somebody in the dining-room now. I'll just see who 'tis; maybe it's only Cecilia setting the table."

She went on tiptoe past the room where her daughter-in-law was resting from the labors of the previous day, and reaching the dining-room, looked in. It was not Cecilia who was humming over the breakfast china, but a big, frowzy-haired woman who turned to stare at her with frank curiosity. Her appearance was rather untidy, but there was something about her broad Irish face which captured the fancy of Grandma Willis at the first glance.

"Good mornin' to ye, ma'am," said the maid, ducking her head as she spoke. "I'm Nora, the cook — and a good manny other things besides."

"I'm glad to see you, Nora," said Grandma Willis, "and I'm glad to see I'm not late. Do you always set the table? I thought Cecilia did that?"

"'Tis Cecilia's worrk, o' course," replied Nora, straightening a fork and squinting at it, "but she's a great girl for sleeping, and sure she's young. I l'ave her have her nap in the morning, rememberin' the time I was young myself."

"Why, you're still young, Nora," and Grandma Willis smiled at her wistfully. "You seem young to me."

"Do I, now?" and Nora, arms akimbo, regarded her with the interest of one to whom a thoroughly novel idea has been presented. "I'm thirty-eight, an' a widdy, an' I feel the best o' my life's far past. I'm worrking to save a bit for my sister's children, that's all keeps me at it. There's siven o' them, growin' like weeds, an' Delia's man the kind that if he has a dollar to his name after the rint's paid, I niver heard of it."

"I'm a widow, too," said Grandma Willis, "but I haven't any sister. I love children,

Nora, and they come to my house, all the children in Burford do."

"Sure, an' I can well believe it," said Nora heartily. "I suppose you're glad there's two here." She stepped close to Grandma Willis. "Miss Dorothy's a pretty little thing," she whispered, "but Master Malcolm's the b'y for me. Whin I have my afternoon out, if he meets me on the street, 'tis 'hello, Nora!' an' if he doesn't speak, 'tis because he doesn't see me, him being all taken up with some other b'y he's talking to. He's the makings of a gentleman, if he don't always remimber to wash his hands."

"But Dorothy — doesn't Dorothy speak to you, Nora?" asked Grandma Willis, in astonishment.

"Her?" said Nora. "This is her, on the street, passing by me."

Elevating her chin, and casting down her eyes until they were quite covered by the lids, Nora passed by Grandma Willis, just as Cecilia's little shoes came tapping along the hall. A few minutes later Malcolm rushed out of his

room, full of the day's business, and he was quickly followed by Dorothy.

"Good-morning, grandmother," said the child, holding out a cool little hand which Grandma Willis tried to keep, but which slipped through her fingers. "Aren't you up very early?"

"It's great to have you here, grandma," said Malcolm who had given her only a brisk 'morning' as he shot across the dining-room and into his chair. "Going to get up this way every day, and sit over there? Mother's never up for breakfast. I should think she'd get sick of lying in bed so long."

"She gets tired, out in society, Malcolm," came from Dorothy in a tone of reproof. "Cecilia, where is the marmalade? Grandmother would like some for her breakfast, I know. And when you've brought it, Cecilia, then you needn't wait any longer."

Her voice was so sweet, and her words so thoughtful that it was hard for Grandma Willis to believe her eyes when she saw Dorothy, who had refused the marmalade from Cecilia's

hands, run around the table and take a great spoonful of it as soon as the maid had gone. Malcolm, eating faster than seemed credible even to a person who watched him, apparently saw nothing beyond his plate.

"Malcolm, you are talking with your mouth full," said Dorothy after one of his clouded utterances. "Mother would be shocked."

"Don't tell her then," said Malcolm, repeating his offence, "unless you'd like me to mention the marmalade," he added.

When breakfast was over, and the children had gone to school, Grandma Willis hurried back to her room. She had offered to stand in the window to wave good-bye to them, but Dorothy had put an end to this plan.

"I go in the carriage, grandmother," she said, "and Malcolm goes around the corner, so you couldn't see him — and people don't wave from windows here."

Grandma Willis thought this over, as she began to make her bed, turning the mattress, and plumping the pillows with energy. She felt the need of action, and it warmed her heart.

"City folks lose a lot of pleasure, seems as if," she said, as she tucked in the last inch of bedspread, and eyed its smooth surface with delight. "That's a pretty quilt as ever I saw. Some day while I'm here I'll take off the pattern, and when I go home —"

She stopped short, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Up home," she told herself, "Molly Sanderson's ironing; she's got a big fire; I could see the smoke through the trees from my doorstone. My land! If I could just run up the lane and speak to her!"

She rose slowly and smoothed the place where she had sat. There came a knock at her door; when she opened it, there stood Cecilia, a duster in her hand.

"I came to put your room in order, Madam Willis," said Cecilia. "I am sorry you have made your bed, already. Mrs. Willis would regret, I am sure."

"Then don't you tell her, Cecilia," said Grandma Willis; "if it would give her nerves a spell, don't you tell her. *You* don't mind it, do you? Everything's strange to me here,"

she hurried on, "everything! At home I'm used to working 'round after breakfast, and I don't know how I could stand it to fold my hands and do nothing. Do you mind?"

Cecilia was an astute young person. She looked at the anxious old face turned to hers, and seeing no loss but rather gain for herself, she unbent so far as to smile, faintly, but undeniably.

"Oh, I've no objections, Madam Willis," she said, "so long as Mrs. Willis does not know. Do you wish to take all the care of your room?"

"I'd like to," said Grandma Willis eagerly, "and I'll do it the very best I can. You tell me what polish you use on the faucets, and I'll buy me some. I'd like to go shopping, some day soon, when I've got my bearings. I've got cleaning cloths, all sorts, in my trunk. I expected to help. I s'pose I couldn't do the parlor dusting?"

"Oh, no, Madam Willis," said Cecilia, "that would not be possible. Mrs. Willis would surely find that out."

When she had departed, Grandma Willis fell

to work again, but there was little she could find to do, beyond removing the light dust which had blown in through her open window. She looked out at the trees and the broad avenue for some time, hoping in vain for a familiar face or figure.

"Where there's so many folks going by, seems as if somebody I know was bound to come along," she said. "There! what's that falling past my window? It's a baby's rattle, I do believe! There must be a baby upstairs, true as this world! Let's see where that went."

She opened the window, and leaned far out, her hands tightly clutching the sill. Down on the strip of green which came between the wall and the pavement, lay the rattle; she could see its red bone stick, and its branching silver arms and bells. Above her she heard an unmistakable wail from a baby voice.

She closed the window, hurried out of her room to the hall door, opened it, stepped cautiously out and across the slippery floor to the elevator. Looking down she saw that the cage was rising, toward her. She hoped it might stop, but it did not. Jim Halloran looked out

at her from behind the iron door as it passed, and Grandma Willis spoke.

"Please stop when you come down," she said, and Jim, who had two passengers, nodded.

When the car came down Grandma Willis pressed close to the door, and spoke through it, eagerly before Jim had time to slide it back.

"There's a baby's rattle fallen out the window, from the room over mine," she told him, "shall I go down and get it or will you? Of course you know the folks and I don't — yet, but I heard the baby cry. It must have slipped out of somebody's hand, the rattle, I mean."

"I'll get it and take it up there," said Jim. "It's the Sweetser's kid that lost it. He's the only baby in the house. I'll tell them 'twas you saw it fall. There's my bell."

"Thank you," said Grandma Willis, "you're a real kind boy," and she walked back to the door of her son's apartment, closing it softly behind her as she entered.

As she passed her daughter-in-law's room, she noticed that the door was half open, and she was accosted by a languid voice from the depths of a lounging chair.

"Won't you come in?" asked Mrs. Willis, "and talk to me for awhile," was added as the cheery old face came nearer. "I feel perfectly wretched this morning."

She wore an elaborate gown of silk and lace, and her hair was carefully dressed, but Grandma Willis saw only the pale, heavy-eyed face, and the thin, restless hands.

"Where does the pain seem to be the worst, dear?" she asked as she stood near the sufferer. "Is it in the back o' your head, or top, or your temples? I'm real used to rubbing, and they do say at home I have a kind of knack of drawing the pain out."

"Oh," her daughter-in-law stared up at her, "I don't want to be rubbed anywhere now. Cecilia has a cousin who comes twice a week and gives me massage treatment. I haven't any special pain. I'm just tired. Sit down and talk to me, please. How do you think Henry looks?"

"Why, he looked sort of — hurried, to me," said Grandma Willis after a moment's hesitation. "He's always been quick, from a boy, but now seems as if he was being driven some

way. I s'pose it's from being so busy all the time."

"I don't like what he does at all," said Louise discontentedly. "I wish he were in some recognized business, not flying around from one scheme to another; though he makes a great deal of money."

"I s'pose I know what you mean," said Grandma Willis, "you feel just the way Mary Hadden up home did about Jake. She used to wish he'd take up with the grocery where his brother was, or else go in with Sam Loomis in the saw mill; he had both chances, but he'd rather do odd jobs — a house shingled here, a cord o' wood sawed an' split there, a new well dug now an' again; but financially he came out as well as most o' the others. That's like Henry, I guess. Louise, do you know where those Sweetsers upstairs that have got a baby came from? Do you s'pose they could be any of the Ed Sweetsers that used to live in Burford? There were two sons. But of course Henry'd have heard."

"I don't know anything about them," said

Louise coldly. "They moved here in September before we got home."

"Well, there, you've been too poorly to call up and see them, of course," said Grandma Willis; then she paused, remembering the afternoon before, and plans she had heard of in the evening. "I mean, I s'pose you don't feel like meeting strangers," she said. "Maybe I'll run up some day, and just say how d'you do, and see the baby. I heard him cry," and she told the story of the rattle with eagerness for the second time.

Her daughter-in-law eyed her curiously.

"It will be a mistake to try to have intimacies here in this house," she said clearly. "We have never done it, and we never intend to. Our friends are all outside. The people here are well enough, but none of them are in our set."

Grandma Willis sat like a person stunned for a moment. Then the color flooded her soft cheeks.

"Don't you do any neighboring?" she asked beseechingly. "Don't you meet together holi-

days or any time? I asked Malcolm this morning to tell me the names off, and he told me. *He* seemed to know about them all. How'd he know if you and Henry don't? "

"Malcolm is — incorrigible!" and Mrs. Willis shrugged her shoulders. "He picks up acquaintances everywhere. He has no discrimination whatever. I'm sorry, as you're away from all your friends, that I shan't be entertaining this winter. I'm too nervous."

"Why, we don't want folks to try to be entertaining when they're not well, dear," said Grandma Willis, her sympathy roused at once.

Again the woman in the lounging chair stared at her. Then she laughed, burying her face in her lace handkerchief.

"Don't you know what entertaining means?" asked Louise, her face emerging from the handkerchief at last. "Don't you read the society columns ever, in the papers Henry is all the time sending you?"

"Oh," and Grandma Willis straightened herself in her chair, "you meant having folks to meet me — that kind of entertaining?"

"Then you do read the society news after all," said Mrs. Willis. "People in the country usually like to hear what's going on, I think, their own lives are so colorless and dull."

Grandma Willis opened her lips, closed them, and then opened them to speak, once for all.

"There's so much going on in Burford that we're afraid sometimes we'll get narrow, not having time to consider what the rest o' the world is doing," she said. "There's church and the Ladies' Aid, and our Book Club, and the Sewing Circle, and visiting and looking out for your home, and tea parties, and the lecture course. There isn't a week but what there's two, three things to go to; I'm speaking now of winter; in summer we don't expect to have time to turn round, with visitors, berrying, preserving, ice-cream socials and all."

Her daughter-in-law looked at her, amusement twitching at her lips. Grandma Willis raised her chin a little higher.

"I take the society news from the city to our minister's wife," she went on. "I tell you, because it won't go any farther. She's young,

and Burford folks might think 'twas kind of light-minded in her to like to read about clothes and parties — some of 'em might. I understand it's because she has such a time making over dresses for her three little girls and Johnny, out of not much of anything, that it's a real rest to her to read about satins and velvets and beaded laces, yards and yards, cut right from the piece, without stint, and picture it all out in her mind. I help her much as I can. We both shut our eyes sometimes and imagine how they look. But if you think she ever envies the folks! Why, we often speak of how tired they must be when night comes, or morning, and they can go to bed. We're as sorry for them as can be!"

CHAPTER VI

AFTERWARD Grandma Willis wondered how she lived through the days that followed, dragging their length in slow succession. There were so few things she could do, so many ways in which she might not help. Her daughter-in-law stayed most of the time in her own room, from which she issued querulous commands.

She heard the voices of the gaily dressed women who called and left solicitous messages with Cecilia. She sometimes caught a glimpse of their gowns from the parlor where she hovered near the door when the bell rang, hop-

ing " against her common sense " for the sight of a familiar face.

The children were full of their own affairs. " How are you getting on, grandma? " Malcolm often asked her affectionately, but he was a very busy young person at all times. Dorothy was agreeable, but she eyed her grandmother's clothes with curiosity.

" Have the people in Burford a dressmaker? " she asked one day, when Grandma Willis had drawn her on to her lap.

Dorothy sat there gazing at her grandmother's agate brooch and the black ribbon bow beneath it. Her voice was sweet as honey, but there was an elfish look on her charming little face, and in a moment she slipped to the floor and fluttered off. The old lady heard her whisper something a few minutes after to one of her friends; the child peeked in at the parlor door, and then they laughed together, a smothered giggle.

No human being could have been less suspicious than Grandma Willis, but she could scarcely mistake the cause of their amusement.

" Well," she thought, with a half smile, " I

suppose maybe I do look funny to them. But I'm own folks to Dorothy. I'm her grandma. You wouldn't believe but what that would make a difference. I'm glad Mary Lizzie Brookins won't ever know; she did her best with this dress, and we thought I'd have compliments on it." She smoothed the skirt gently. "It won't matter to me by to-morrow, 'most likely, but now — now seems as if I'd got to run home, just for a minute, to take a good long breath."

It was drizzling weather. Twice Grandma Willis started for a walk, but the noise confused her; she did not try to cross the street. Thursday afternoon Mrs. Willis roused herself, and ordered the carriage.

"Tell Patrick to drive her up and down the avenue, slowly, so she can see the shops," said Mrs. Willis to Cecilia, giving her orders with closed eyes, clasping a bottle of smelling salts in her nervous hands. "And if she'd like to drive in the Park, he can take her there; tell him to be gone two hours. I shall be so thankful to know she's enjoying herself. She really is on my mind every minute."

"Yes, Mrs. Willis," said Cecilia, "it is a great care for you."

"It was a mistaken idea of my husband's, that she would be a help to me," sighed Mrs. Willis. "I hope you see that she has everything she wishes, Cecilia."

"Certainly, Mrs. Willis, I constantly inquire what she would like," and Cecilia's air was that of one who felt herself incapable of the slightest neglect of duty.

The outing was taken, to its full two-hour limit, but not all in the neat, tightly closed little brougham which Henry Willis hired by the month for his wife's use. Grandma Willis, gazing out through its windows at the shops and the stream of passers-by, felt the waves of homesick longing close about her throat.

"My stars!" she murmured, as the congestion of traffic stopped the carriage before a toy shop; "I've got to get out a minute! I feel's if I couldn't stand it!"

She tapped on the glass as Cecilia had instructed her to do if she wished to stop. The coachman dismounted and opened the door for her to alight.

"I'm just going in there for a minute or two," she told him, as she stepped on the curb. "You wait for me, won't you?"

The man touched his cap respectfully, and looked after her as she hurried away from him, and into the shop, her purse in her hand, her head bent.

"'Tis a black shame sending the poor soul out by herself," said Patrick in a tone of disgust. "She's fair sick with lonesomeness, I can tell by the look of her."

In the shop Grandma Willis stood gazing blindly about her for a moment. A young woman stepped up and smilingly asked if there were anything she could do for her. Never in her life had Grandma Willis failed to answer a smile. She looked so gratefully up at the young woman that another salesgirl standing near by whispered to her companion.

"Nellie's made another hit with that smile of hers," she said; "isn't she a sweet old country thing, that old lady she's got now?"

"I don't know what I want, exactly," said Grandma Willis to the smiling girl. "I just came in here because the carriage stopped front

of your door, and it looked so pretty. But I'd like to buy something for a boy and something for a girl."

"How old are the children?" asked Nellie with a capable, interested air.

"Malcolm's eleven, and Dorothy is nine," said their grandmother. "They seem to have 'most everything, and Christmas is coming too, but I thought I'd like to take them each home a little present, my first shopping. I've only been in the city three days. I guess you'd know I'm from the country, wouldn't you?" and she laughed, the little silvery tinkling laugh that had charmed the judge out of his silence.

"I love the country, when I get a chance to go off," said Nellie by way of answer, smiling down at her customer; "it's ten times better than the city, I think. I'll show you some new puzzles; they came in yesterday, and I should say children would be crazy about them. They're twenty-five cents apiece; that's enough to pay for any puzzle."

Nearly an hour later Grandma Willis made her way to the door, escorted by the smiling Nellie, followed in her progress by many glances

of interest. She had seen not only the puzzles two of which she carried in a small parcel, but toys of every description, from little electric engines and automobiles, milk-carts and hay-riggings, to tiny silver-backed brushes and mirrors for beautiful dolls that talked, cried and even sang. Best of all she had made a friend, and received a hearty invitation to call again. In the midst of her pleasure she had remembered the waiting Patrick, but Nellie had dispatched a small errand boy to the carriage with a message that "the lady wouldn't be out for half an hour or so," and Patrick had improved the time by attending to one or two private matters, much to his satisfaction.

He was back at the curb, waiting for her when she stepped out, a little dazed, but happy, with her parcel under her arm.

"'Tis a pretty place, ma'am," he ventured as he tucked the robe around her before closing the carriage door.

"It's a wonderful place, Patrick," said Grandma Willis with enthusiasm, and the coachman mounted to his box, much pleased with her answer.

The next day it rained, a steady, unrelenting down-pour. Grandma Willis went from one window to another, looking wistfully out at the wayfarers, hurrying along under their umbrellas, at the horses stepping slowly over the wet asphalt, at the automobiles, dashing past, whirling out of sight before she had fairly seen them. All day she watched the panorama, for the children did not come home until late in the afternoon. Dorothy had gone to take a French lesson at the house of one of her friends and Malcolm was with six other boys, learning to carve wood and make various articles of doubtful use.

"Everybody's going somewhere," said Grandma Willis; "I wonder where they live, all of them. I wish there was a tin roof to this house, so I could hear the rain. Coming down straight like this I can't hear it on the windows. I guess I'll look at those magazines again. I wish I had a good story book. They don't seem to have books, excepting those big ones with the high-colored pictures. I guess Louise doesn't read much, and of course Henry

wouldn't. I know what I'll do, I'll put up two, three of my chromos I brought down."

She went to the kitchen door and opened it. Nora was sitting at the table, her frowzy head bent over a sheet of paper, a pen in her ink-stained fingers. Her lips were screwed out of shape and the pen was scratching as she bore down on it.

"Excuse me for interrupting your letter, Nora," she said, "but I thought maybe you'd know where there's a hammer and some little tacks. I want to nail up two, three colored pictures I brought down from home. I'm going to put them on my bedroom walls; they're real pretty; there's a farm scene, and 'At Twilight,' and one of a little brook with a boy fishing in it."

"I'd get you the hammer in a minute, if I dared," said Nora, and her broad face wore a look of honest distress; "but 'tis in the lease o' this place that not a nail's to be driven in the walls or woodwork annywhere. The pictures has all to be hung from the mouldings. Ain't that a pity now!" for Grandma Willis's face

showed her disappointment. "Could you hang them anny way at all?"

"No, there's nothing to hang, they're just paper," said Grandma Willis slowly. "Well, never mind. I can set them up on the bureau, if I buy a little pasteboard and paste them on, so they'll be stiff."

"Sure you're the one to think of things," said Nora with unfeigned admiration. "Ain't it the rainy day, though? I'm glad 'tis not to-morrow, for that's my afternoon out, and I'm going to take my sister's children into the Park and show them the animals."

Grandma Willis looked at her with eyes suddenly alight with pleasure, and a spark of mischief. She felt like a naughty child about to steal forbidden joys.

"If it's pleasant, I'll go to the Park myself, to-morrow afternoon, Nora," she said softly. "What time you going?"

"I'm to meet them at the corner beyant at two o'clock precise," said Nora, her face puckered with her attempt at gravity.

"I should think I'd probably go a little before that," said Grandma Willis, demurely,

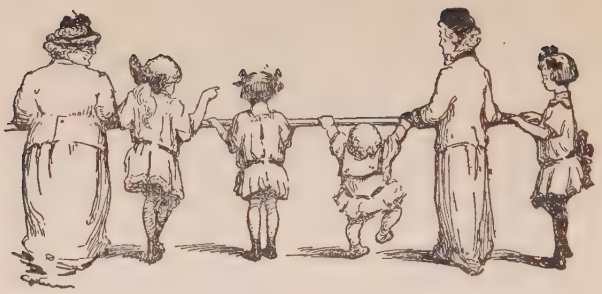
smoothing the skirt of her gown. "Would you — should you stay at home if it sprinkled just a mite, Nora?"

"Me?" said Nora, "indeed not! I've an umbrella an' plenty of old clothes."

"So have I, Nora," said Grandma Willis, and laying her hand on her lips, she nodded wisely at Nora, who returned the nod in token of perfect understanding.

As she tiptoed back to her room there was more color in her cheeks, and her lips had an upward curve at the corners.

"If I can't have some folks for friends, I guess I can have others," said Grandma Willis. "We'll see if I can't."



CHAPTER VII

THERE was no blot on Saturday's fair page for Grandma Willis. It was a perfect day; the air and sky of Indian summer greeted her when she leaned from her window in the early morning, searching the clouds for signs, and the landscape for a weather vane.

"There's one on that building way over yonder," she said when at last she caught a glitter against the sky, "but 'tis too far for me to know which way 'tis pointing. I don't even know where's east and west here; I must ask Henry when he comes back. Maybe Malcolm would know."

But Malcolm proved ignorant in that respect, though he promised to find out.

"Course I know the sun sets over there, grandma," he said, pointing with his fork to one of the dining-room walls, "but I don't know exactly what part of it is the real west."

"Malcolm, mother never allows you to point with the table things," said Dorothy, and the fork dropped with a clatter. "What difference does it make where the east is, grandmother?" she asked.

Among her other hopes, the old lady held one which pulsed strong with the least encouragement. She longed to win the love of the little granddaughter who seemed to her so sadly in need of the warmth that loving brings.

"Why, it's so interesting, dearie," she said eagerly. "Couldn't you and I go some day to a shop where we could buy us a little compass that tells where the north is? I've seen them real little and pretty, that would hang on that chain o' yours with your other trinkets. I'll get you one, and then — then we couldn't ever lose our way."

Dorothy was pleased with this suggestion, for none of her friends could boast such an ornament.

"We could go some day, in the carriage," she said. "I don't like walking, grandmother. I am not very strong."

"Huh!" said Malcolm. "She'll dance all this afternoon at a party, grandma, and she'll eat more candy than you could shake a stick at."

Dorothy laughed, and so did her grandmother, though she was sorry, too. The children ran off, Dorothy to a music lesson, Malcolm to some good time with his friends. As he said good-bye he drew his grandmother's head down close to his.

"Want to go to church and hear me sing, to-morrow?" he whispered. "I've got a solo. And say, grandma, you can sit in the Sweetser's pew. I'll introduce you. Mrs. Sweetser's awfully pretty, and she'd like to know you, 'count of the baby's rattle. I saw her in the elevator last night. Want to go?"

"Oh, Malcolm," and Grandma Willis hugged him, "I'd rather do it than anything else in this world! There, I've mussed your tie!"

"Never you mind," said Malcolm, as he twitched the tie into place. "Good-bye — and

you don't need to tell about the Sweetsers, till afterward."

His grandmother nodded. She scarcely recognized herself in the atmosphere of secrecy which now seemed to her to surround all her simple doings.

"I feel like a conspirator," she told herself; "but there! I'm not harming anybody, and I s'pose it's best to save Louise's nerves if there's any such thing in the book!"

When she stole out of the door that afternoon, Cecilia was ministering to Mrs. Willis, who had an attack of nerves brought on by the coal which had been pouring into the cellar, rattling down the shaft from the upturned coal-carts. Grandma Willis had watched the process with great enjoyment, but her daughter-in-law, who would not have the windows closed because she said she "felt stifled," became gradually hysterical as cart after cart was emptied of its rattling contents. Grandma Willis in her anxiety to close the door softly, shut the hem of her skirt in it.

"I won't ring that bell now, no matter what happens," she said, and with a valiant tug, she

wrested her skirt from the grasp of the door. "Only a little mite o' the hem torn," she said exultantly after a careful examination. "Fixing that'll give me something to do to-morrow, no, I mean Monday. The days seem all alike to me with nothing to tell them apart by. Up home they're sewing for that Minnesota minister's folks to-day, I s'pose. I'd like to step in on them, just for a minute."

"Are you having a good time?" asked Jim Halloran, before he slid back the door to let her out of the elevator. "I was saying to Larry you didn't look it, not real gay, when I've seen you."

His words were blunt, but they were spoken with an air of interest borne out by his expression and by Larry's, as he stood waiting to open the door for her.

"Why, thank you, boys," said Grandma Willis. "I've been — don't you believe country folks always feel kind of lonesome and scared, just at first, in the city? I guess they do. I'm going to have a real good time this afternoon. I'm going to the Park, and the zoo, to see the animals with — with a friend."

She ended her sentence in a whisper, her eyes again alight with mischief.

"You'll like them," said Jim, "they're great. Say, you take particular notice of the giraffe; I'd like to hear what you think of him."

"The monkeys are the best," said Larry with decision. "You get some peanuts to feed 'em, and you'll have some fun. They'll be lots of kids there to-day. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Grandma Willis. "I wish you boys were going with me."

"Gee! what do you think Mrs. Willis would have said if she'd heard that!" and Jim executed a short jig on the marble tiles. "Anyway, she's the best of that whole bunch; she and Malcolm; he's pretty good for a swell kid."

"They're no swells," said Larry; "there, she's got across all right. The cop had her by the arm, and he touched his hat to her when he let go. I'll bet he liked her looks."

It was an afternoon of perfect joy to Grandma Willis. She was sitting on a bench, her feet swinging, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes lifted to the tree tops, and her lips parted in ecstasy, when Nora and four of her sister's

children found her. After that for nearly three charmed hours they roamed the Park together. Nora's three small nieces and still smaller nephew were so charged with rules for behavior during their walk from the entrance gate to the bench, that at first they were dumb and ill at ease; but in less than half an hour they were fighting for the places which enabled them to maintain a clutch on her sleeves, and which had at last to be apportioned by Nora with stern justice, by means of alternate fifteen-minute "turns."

When they were parting, well inside the gate, so that Grandma Willis might reach home in advance of Nora, the little boy twitched at his aunt's skirt, and whispered something in her ear. She shook her head violently, but Grandma Willis had caught a glance from the big Irish eyes, and would not have the child denied his wish.

"Does he want to kiss me good-bye, Nora?" she asked. "Well, he shall; I'd love to have him."

"And me too!" shrilled the three little girls in hasty chorus, "and me too!"

"Here then!" commanded Nora, and produ-

cing a large handkerchief she scrubbed each pair of lips and a sufficient surrounding area, till the children cried for mercy. "And say 'thank you,' when you've got your kiss."

"Thank you! thank you!" came from the four little voices, as one after another the children were lifted to the bench, and brought on a level with the object of their admiration. The tiny Mike came last of all, by his own wish, and he put his arms tight around Grandma Willis's neck.

"Will you be here again, some day, grandma?" he asked.

Nora was frankly shocked at his daring.

"Sure, I hope you'll excuse him, ma'am," she said. "He's not got his sinses yet, and he's no grandma of his own. And —"

But Grandma Willis did not heed her. She was squeezing little Mike and giving him a second kiss.

"Thank you, dearie," she said as she set him gently on the ground. "Thank you, very much."

"What did she thank Mikey for?" asked the oldest of the little girls, when Grandma Willis

had disappeared. "What made her, Aunt Nora?"

"Come here to me, and let me fasten up your shoes," said Nora by way of reply, "and don't be axin' so manny questions; if I answered the half o' them, I'd have no time for annything else from morning till night. And don't be staring at me like that; turn your heads around, the three of you, till I tie your bows so you'll be fit to go home on the cars to your mother."

"Are you crying, Aunt Nora?" demanded the child. "Your eyes look —"

"Niver you mind my eyes," said Nora, as she twirled her small nieces about, one after the other. "It's enough to make anny person cry to look at the three heads on you. You're a sight! Hold still now till I make you decent!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE next afternoon Grandma Willis sat down to write a letter to Mrs. Sanderson, the first letter since she left Burford. Ample leisure for writing had been hers every day, and the desk in her room was well stocked with paper, pens and ink; but the spirit had been lacking. Sunday afternoon her pen flew over the paper and she wrote until her hand was tired and her fingers threatened with cramp.

"There," she said triumphantly as she put the letter in its envelope and added the stamp, exactly even, in its proper corner, "I guess I've told her all there was to tell, and more, too. Now if I can limber up my fingers a mite, I'd like to send a few words to Mrs. Briggs, on

account of having said so much to Molly in my letter, about the church I went to this morning. The letter'll probably go the rounds, and I shouldn't want any misunderstanding.

"Dear Mrs. Briggs," she wrote when she could move her fingers without a prickling in their tips, "Mrs. Sanderson will most likely pass my letter on to those that are interested; I've written her a pretty full account of my doings, with that idea in view. You'll hear about my going to the Episcopal church this morning, where my grandson sings in the choir; I've written real enthusiastic about it, for I felt so; I had a beautiful time; I sat with some folks by the name of Sweetser, young folks — no relation to the Ed Sweetsers, though I hoped maybe they were. I've written Mrs. Sanderson about it, and how pretty Mrs. Sweetser is, and how she found all the places for me in her little books, and how I did just what she did, near as I could.

"There's a lot more getting up and down than we have in our church, but 'twas all interesting, and when it came to the Psalms and the hymns and some of the prayers, 'twould have

pleased your husband to hear how the folks took hold and joined in. And there never was anything prettier than those little boys all dressed up in white gowns same as you've seen them in pictures, singing with all their hearts, marching behind a boy that held a beautiful sparkling gold cross high up,— just like it says in 'Onward Christian Soldiers.' And by and by Malcolm sung out all by himself, 'long in the middle of the service, and there were others beside me had to wipe their eyes.

"But the sermon — now I want you to tell your husband this — it was *real* good, what there was of it; there were two or three things he said that I wish now I'd charged my mind with, but I was waiting for him to get to the body of the sermon, knowing I couldn't remember all, and first I knew 'twas over and done with! he'd turned around, and we'd all stood up, and he'd said 'amen,' and given out another hymn!

"I asked the Sweetsers about it, coming home, and they said no, 'twasn't an unusually short sermon; he never spoke more than fifteen minutes at the most, they said.

"So of course I couldn't help contrasting him with your husband, who can and does preach an hour, easy, and we all know he could talk twice as long without his ideas giving out. I spoke complimentary to the Sweetsers about their minister, for he certainly has a good voice, and what little he said was good, too. But all the time I kept thinking, 'if they had been privileged to sit under Parson Briggs's preaching they'd notice the difference!' With best regards to you and your husband, and a kiss for each of the children,

"Yours affectionately,

"Sarah Willis."

On a slip of paper carefully folded four times and marked "*Private*" was another message.

"I haven't been to see any dresses yet, my daughter-in-law being so miserable, but I took special pains to look at Mrs. Sweetser's sleeves; they're same as those in that paper that we liked; kind of small, with a deep cuff. She'd have what was late as anything, I know. She's going to take me shopping some day — then I'll write more particulars. S. W."

When the second letter had been placed in its envelope Grandma Willis drew a chair close to the window, pushed back the curtains and looked out at the wide street with its hurrying throng and across to the Park. As she looked the lights flared out, not one after another, but all at once, and Grandma Willis laughing softly, pressed closer to the glass.

A change in the air had come with the going down of the sun, and a few flakes of snow floated aimlessly past her window; she could not see that any of them reached a lodging.

"Pretty things," she said half aloud as she watched them. "I wish Ed Gowdy could have seen those lights come out. He probably began lighting, down on the Hollow road, about half-past four, and he'll finish up at his own corner somewhere round six, he and his old horse. Always seems to me as if the horse had full as much to do with it as Ed. The lamp down on the Hollow road usually goes out between two and three in the morning, they say; doctor's found it so; nobody else would know. There's a man going along, walks some like Franklin Townsend; he's taller, though. I wish Louise's

nerves would be so she'd feel able to come to supper to-night; some way Sunday night is a time when you want to gather together. Maybe we could sing a few hymns or something. Why there! I hear her voice outside her room. She's feeling better."

Involuntarily Grandma Willis jumped from her chair, but before she reached the door, her feet lagged; already she had learned to doubt the probability of a warm reception from her daughter-in-law at any time. She stopped short, and stood listening. Steps came along the hall and then there was a knock at her door. She opened it, her face alight with welcome, to see Mrs. Willis in a shimmering gown, with a wrap over her shoulders.

"I'm feeling a trifle stronger," came in the languid voice to which Grandma Willis was growing accustomed, "and I have decided to go to one of my friends who is having a little supper-party. The change will do me good, and she is really depending on me; I think one should not be selfish at such times, simply considering one's own feelings — so I'm going," she finished abruptly and with a slight edge of

irritation caused by the wondering look in the face before her.

"Do they have *parties* Sunday nights?" asked the old lady.

"Why certainly, informal suppers and things of that sort," said her daughter-in-law impatiently. "You must remember this is the city; it's quite different from Burford, and Burford ways."

"Yes, I keep trying to remember that," said Grandma Willis quietly; "a good many times a day I remind myself of it. Well, dear, I hope you'll have a real pleasant time. Is that dress warm enough? It's growing colder, and there's snow in the air; don't your neck and arms need a little more protection than that cape?"

"No, indeed," and Mrs. Willis drew the wrap closer as she spoke, "I shall be in a warm carriage, and then in a warm house; again you must remember this is not Burford. Malcolm said he would be at home for supper, so you will surely enjoy it. Dorothy is to take tea with a friend. Good-night. I suppose you will be tucked in bed before I get home. Oh, by the way, I had a telegram from Henry this morn-

ing. He will be at home to-morrow, sooner than he expected; that is the way it happens, often. Good-night."

"Good-night, dear," said Grandma Willis; "thank you for telling me the good news."

She returned to her chair by the window, but she did not look out again for some time. The flakes increased in number till they made a shifting veil between her window and the lights.

"Sunday night," she said to herself, and repeated it, as if the words held some meaning she had never guessed. "Why, I can't seem to sense it! I thought no matter what folks believed or where they lived, they made a difference between Sunday and other days. I wonder if it's all like this. When do they have their family times? I feel all turned around."

She faced the window again, and at the moment a sturdy little figure passed under the arc light at the Park entrance, running, with face upturned.

"That's Malcolm," said Grandma Willis delightedly; "he's hurrying home! Well there, 'tisn't everybody in this city, I guess, who's got

such a grandson as I have. Maybe he'd like to find my door open wide, when he comes, 's if I was just watching for him."

She drew her curtains, turned on the light, and sat looking toward her door, set wide open, a smile curving her lips. She heard the rush of Malcolm's feet from the elevator to the door, the turning of his key in the lock, and the slam of the door behind him.

"'Bijah never could seem to close a door soft, though he was a gentle man other ways," she murmured tenderly, as she listened to Malcom's whistle, while he hung his hat and coat in the hall closet and swung that door behind him.

"I saw you, sitting in the dark, grandma," said Malcolm when he reached her door. "Your hair was right where the electric light struck it, against the glass. What have you been doing all afternoon?"

"I've been writing letters, and thinking a good deal," said Grandma Willis, "and now we'll do whatever you like. Your mother has gone to a party — a supper-party," she cor-

rected herself conscientiously, "and Dorothy is to take tea with a friend. What shall we do, Malcolm?"

"Let me think what we'll have for supper, first," said Malcolm, who had received her news about the family with the indifference born of habit. "Nora'll get anything I say. Look here, grandma, how would you feel about griddle-cakes with maple syrup, and top off with gingerbread? Nora always makes a loaf for me Saturdays, for Sunday night. Dorothy's hardly ever home, and anyway she think's gingerbread is 'common.' Aren't girls the silliest things you ever heard, grandma? I tell her it isn't half common enough to suit me, and then she puts on that young lady air of hers and says, 'puns are commoner than gingerbread.' It's one of our regular conversations. Dorothy has some good points, but she's being spoiled, because she's pretty and smart," said Malcolm with the gravity of a judge. "What do you think of my menu, grandma?"

"Why, I always like griddle-cakes," said Grandma Willis, "if 'tisn't too much trouble for Nora."

"'Course 'tisn't," said Malcolm, and was off like a shot.

"I'll get out a tumbler of her grape jam that she brought down," said Nora to Malcolm; "it looks elegant. I've had it hid away so Miss Dorothy wouldn't get her fingers on it. You run along now, and I'll have the table ready for you in a little while, and the first batch o' cakes before you're hardly in your chairs, the two of you. Ask your grandma if she can't play a tune on the pyanny to make the time pass. I heard her touching the keys, one day."

"Nora's all right, grandma, isn't she?" said Malcolm, returning to Grandma Willis who still sat in her doorway. "Here's what she said," and he repeated Nora's words. "She's worth ten of Cecilia; *she* tries to be a lady, and she's a regular sham. She just loves going to people's houses, to the front door, to ask for 'Miss Dorothy Willis,' and bring her home. That's what she'll do to-night. Say, grandma, do you know any tunes?"

"I can play 'Duke Street' and 'America' and 'Coronation,' a few hymns like that," said Grandma Willis, her eyes tinkling; "that's all

I can do; sometimes I play them for the Sunday School, when there isn't anybody else to do it."

"Come on," said Malcolm, seizing her hand. "Let's have a sing together, you and I; let's sing out, loud as we want to; there's nobody to mind."

"I'm not much used to a piano," said his grandmother, when Malcolm had established her on the piano-stool, and raised the top of the instrument as high as it would go. "I'm accustomed to a melodeon."

"Are you?" and Malcolm seemed especially pleased at her statement. "Then you'd better let me work the pedals for you? Dorothy never will let me — I'll bring a chair up close to yours, and you move your feet off a little to one side. I know just how to use the pedals, at the beginning of every measure. I can't play because my fingers are short and not flexible, but I can keep time all right."

He moved a chair close to his grandmother; and after a moment of consultation their musical performance began. Grandma Willis had a sweet treble, and the boy's alto held a quality which surprised everyone who heard him sing.

The words of ' Coronation ' came with such evident sincerity of feeling, and such purity of tone that the little old singer beside him was greatly moved.

" I like to listen to you so, I 'most forget to carry my part," she said in apology for a slight wavering of the air in the last verse; " suppose we sing the next one without the instrument, Malcolm."

" All right," said the boy, " I kept forgetting the pedals anyway. Let's try. Oh bother! who's ringing that old door bell! and Nora's just begun on the supper, I know. I'll answer the bell myself, as long as Dorothy isn't here to kick about it. I'll go, Nora," he called, and ran to the door.

A short thickset man rather flashily dressed stood there. His black eyes under their heavy black brows glowed in a face which but for them would have lacked all color; the lips were so thin that their pale line scarcely showed in the flabby, smooth-shaven face. Malcolm looked at him with instant dislike.

" Is Mr. Willis at home? Your father, I suppose? " said the man.

"No, sir," said Malcolm, "he'll not be at home until to-morrow."

"Won't?" said the man with evident irritation. "Why, I told him to come to-day; at least I told him he'd better."

Grandma Willis stepped out of the parlor and over to the door. She did not like the man's face or his manner, but she would not deny him the rights of a guest.

"Is there anything I could tell him, any message I could take?" she asked the man. "I'm his mother. His wife is out just now."

"Generally out, I suppose," said the man with a sneer. Then he took a second look at Grandma Willis, and with a half apologetic murmur he removed his hat. "I'm afraid it won't do to leave a message," he said shortly. "I couldn't make it plain. Except — yes, you might tell him that Gorham Leeds called, and that he'll be here again to-morrow night. Think you can remember that? I don't happen to have my calling cards with me, I'm not much of a lady's man; but your son will see me, you can count on that. I'm a partic'lar friend of his."

"Gorham Leeds," repeated Grandma Willis, "Gorham Leeds; yes, sir, I'll be sure to tell him. I have a good memory for names; and Malcolm has a splendid one."

"M-m, well he looks as if he'd be better pleased if he'd never heard my name," said the man with a disagreeable smile. "Good-night. Henry Willis doesn't happen to be your stepson, does he?"

"No, indeed, he's my own boy," said Grandma Willis. "Good-night," she added hastily as the disagreeable smile came a second time.

"He doesn't look it," said the man, and putting on his hat he turned away from the door. "Good-night again."

Grandma Willis was trembling with indignation as Malcolm shut the door with a bang.

"I don't like the way that man spoke," she said. "I don't believe he can be a particular friend of Henry's! I think he was bragging when he said it."

"I don't know," said Malcolm slowly, as they went back to the piano. "Father has some pretty queer friends, grandma. He says you

have to know all kinds. I hated that man the minute I saw him."

"I wouldn't make a practice of hating folks, dear," said Grandma Willis; "it hurts you more than it does them, and some folks don't show off well, first time you see them; maybe he'd be different if you came to know him."

"I'll never come to know anybody who looks like that," said Malcolm firmly. "Come on, grandma, let's sing something and forget him."

They tried another hymn, but for some reason it did not go off as well as the first.

"That man has spoiled everything," said Malcolm wrathfully. "I wish he'd stayed where he belongs. Grandma, here's our next Sunday's anthem; let's try my solo; you play it with one finger for me."

He set a small sheet of music on the rack and turned the pages, whistling, till he found the place. Grandma Willis put on her spectacles and began to play, softly and slowly, the color rising in her cheeks.

"It is beautiful," she said under her breath; "beautiful! Now let's do it together, and I'll try both hands, real careful."

She had played only one measure, when there came a summons from Nora, who spoke from the dining-room.

"Here's your griddle-cakes," she called, with a joyous remembrance of Mrs. Willis's commands to her to "speak in a low voice," and the surety that her mistress would never know how they were set aside. "Come and get them while they're hot! They're sizzling on the plates!"

Malcolm seized his grandmother and bore her, laughing, to the dining-room. Nora had vanished, but the cakes were there, two steaming piles, with a pitcher of maple syrup.

"Aren't they good," said Malcolm as he took his first liberal mouthful. "Say, grandma, let's do this every Sunday night!"

"I'd —" began Grandma Willis, then she put down her knife and fork. "Somebody's opening the front door," she said.

"Why, it's father," said Malcolm, who had left his chair at the sound of the key turning in the lock. "You're just in time for the griddle-cakes, father."

"Why, Henry, you dear boy!" cried Grand-

ma Willis, her hand on his arm before he was fairly in the hall. "If this isn't the very best surprise that ever was! But you look tired out. You haven't been ill, have you?"

"Ill! no, I'm never ill; but I'm played out; this travelling around in cars will be the death of me. I found I could get home to-night, so I came. Well, how are you getting on, mother? Used to the city yet?"

The eyes that looked down at her from the tired face were bright as her own, but hard as Grandma Willis had never seen them before. She was startled.

"He looks despairing," she thought in that moment before she spoke. "He doesn't look like my boy. Something's happened."

"I'm getting on first-rate, dear," she said. "A man came to see you a little while ago. His name was Gorham Leeds. Why, Henry!"

There was no doubt about what she had heard. Striking his hand against the table, a sudden blaze flaming in his eyes, he had flung an oath at the name she spoke.

Hearing him and seeing the rage in his face, it was as if her son had vanished, leaving in his

place a man she had never known. For an instant she shrank from him as if the words had struck her; then she straightened her back and laid her hand on his arm.

"You're all tired out, and not yourself, Henry, or else you'd never speak like that," she said with gentle dignity. "And most likely you're hungry; you come out in the dining-room with me and have some supper. I'm glad Malcolm had gone back to his griddle-cakes before you spoke so; you wouldn't have wanted him to hear you, I know. And we won't talk about that man any more, unless you want to tell me about him sometime. I wasn't pleased with his appearance."

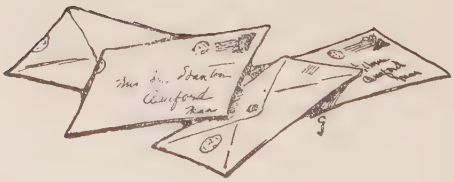
To her amazement her son chuckled as he tucked her hand in his arm and started for the dining-room, and she saw that his anger had gone.

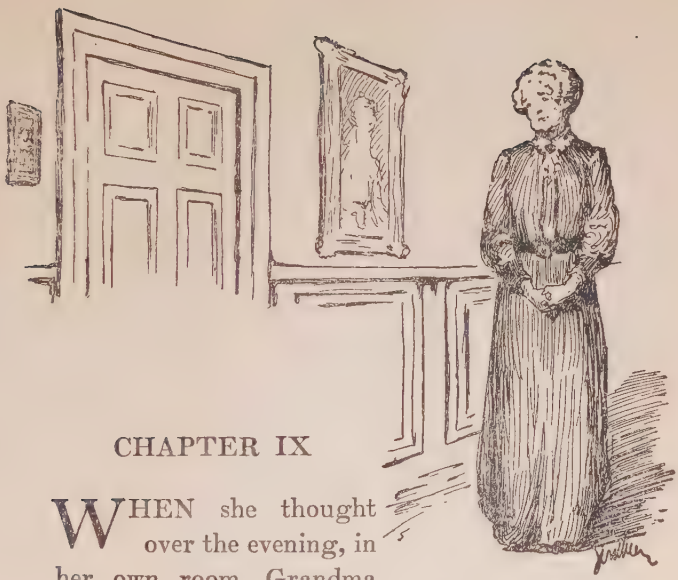
"I'll have to tell him that," he said. "It was a cheeky thing of him to do, to call at the house, on business, Sunday night. It made me mad, for a minute."

"There! I knew you'd kept Burford ideas about some things," and Grandma Willis looked

up into the eyes which met hers and quickly glanced away. "Sunday is for family times. But then, maybe Mr. Gorham Leeds hasn't any family."

"Perhaps not," said Henry Willis in a non-committal tone; "and if he has I'm not half as much interested in them as I am in those griddle-cakes. Malcolm, go tell Nora I've come, and the next plateful will be for me. This is the kind of family time that suits me to a T."





CHAPTER IX

WHEN she thought over the evening, in her own room, Grandma Willis was not quite satisfied. She remembered that the hard look had never wholly left her son's eyes; that although his laugh had been loud and frequent, there had been a quality in it that matched his look; it had not rung true. She fell asleep thinking about him. Once in the night she woke, hearing voices; she could not distinguish the words, but the tones struck through the haze of her sleep, making an un-

pleasant impression. The conversation lasted a long time.

"That's Henry and Louise," she thought, "and it must be the middle o' the night. Henry ought to be asleep in his bed. He'll be having nerves himself, next thing we know. I wish I could do something. I don't seem to be a mite of help, so far. But there! I haven't been here quite a week yet! I'm an impatient old woman, that's what I am. I ought to have a real talking to!"

Next morning at breakfast her son had something to tell her which brought a glow to her cheeks, in spite of herself.

"Louise is going South to-morrow for awhile with some friends of hers," said Henry Willis, his eyes on the toast he was buttering with elaborate care. "I told her you'd get on all right, mother, you and Nora; I shall probably be at home for part of each week for the next two or three months, and we'll run the house together, you and I. She'll take Cecilia with her. The change will do Louise good. What do you say, mother?" and for a moment he lifted his eyes to look across the table at her.

"Why, I'll do my best," said Grandma Willis, the delight of a child struggling with her desire to be courteous, for the mastery of her voice; "but I'm sorry for you, Henry, that she's got to be away from you, and sorry for her."

"Oh, well, people get used to separations," and her son gave an embarrassed laugh. "It isn't quite as it used to be when you and father were together, you know. Things are different, at least in the city," he finished lamely.

"I hope the time will never come when married folks will stop wanting each other more than anybody else, country or city," said Grandma Willis; "but I know that isn't what you meant, dear. You meant there are so many kinds of business and health troubles now that do take folks away from each other, no matter how fond they are. Of course I can't fill the place Louise has in your heart or your home, but I'll do my best to take care of you and the children and the house while she has to be away. Here comes Dorothy. I'm afraid she'll take it hard, won't she?"

But the way in which Dorothy took it was a great surprise to her grandmother.

"What a bother!" cried the child. "Our first dancing-party comes in November, just before Thanksgiving; that will be in less than a month; and I haven't any dress, and there won't be anyone to take me! And who'll call for me when I go out to tea? I should think mother could get a maid down South and let Cecilia stay at home!"

"Now see here, young lady," said her father. "You've had altogether too many parties and too much waiting on; it won't do you a bit of harm to stay at home from a few teas and dancing-parties, and go to bed early, as a child of your age should."

"The dancing-parties are in the afternoon," said Dorothy, changing her tone as she saw her father's displeasure. "I'll find somebody to take me."

"I'll take you, dearie," said Grandma Willis eagerly, "I'd love to do it, and see the pretty dancing. And I can go with you to buy a dress if you need a new one; your mother'll tell me where to go."

"You!" said Dorothy, her delicate eyebrows arched with amusement.

"Yes," said her father quickly. "That will be the very thing! A capital idea, mother, thank you. If you are willing to trot around with Dorothy a little it will be a great kindness to her, and to me. When did you say this party is to come off?"

"Perhaps mother won't wish me to go, after all," said Dorothy, but as her father continued to look at her, she told him the date.

"I'll see that you both have flowers," said Henry Willis, taking out his notebook. "I believe that's the proper thing for me to do."

"Perhaps grandmother hasn't any — hasn't the right kind of a dress," suggested Dorothy, who was far from satisfied with the plan her father regarded with such favor.

"Yes, dearie, I have a nice black silk dress, with the neck cut out a mite, and white lace in it," said Grandma Willis; "it would be all right for me to go to a children's party in, I'm sure — wouldn't it?" and she turned, appealing to her son's judgment.

"The best thing in the world," said Henry,

his eyes fixed on Dorothy's face, his jaw firmly set. "You'll be the best looking woman there — and the most appropriately dressed. Dorothy will have reason to be proud of you."

"You're flattering your old mother," said Grandma Willis, but she was so delighted with his praise and his growing cheerfulness that Dorothy's failure to respond went almost unnoticed; not quite, for the memory of her discontented face came back to the little grandmother later.

"No," she told herself with frankness, "Dorothy isn't pleased about it; I expect she's afraid I won't look nor act just the way she'd like to have me. Maybe I shan't, but I'll do the best I can, and I'll watch the other ladies, so I won't make mistakes. Doesn't seem as if there could be much society to it — just a child's party."

Her misgivings were not lessened by her daughter-in-law's words when the time came to say good-bye the next day.

"About Dorothy's party," said Mrs. Willis as she buttoned her gloves, her glance travelling over the black mohair which Grandma Willis

had worn with the thought that she perhaps might be invited to drive to the station, "Henry says you would really like to take her. Are you sure you wouldn't rather be saved the bother? She can go perfectly well with the mother of one of her friends. I felt that perhaps you were not — quite — prepared for anything of the kind."

Before Grandma Willis could speak, her son, who had entered the room, settled the matter once for all.

"She is well enough prepared," he said with decision, "and she's going. Come, Louise, it's time you started."

When they had fairly gone, Grandma Willis, left alone by the elevator to which she had followed them, stood for a moment gazing down the shaft. Then, as she turned to go back to the apartment a slight bumping sound in the hall above caught her attention.

"That's the Sweetser's baby-carriage," she said. "I've a mind to run up the stairs and tell Mrs. Sweetser I'm left alone. Maybe she'd come down and see me."

Drawing her skirts close about her as if she

feared their rustle might betray her to some listener, she sped up over the stairs. Mrs. Sweetser was tucking the robe carefully in around the baby and giving some final instructions to the little nursemaid as Grandma Willis, flushed and panting from her flight, reached the door.

"I heard the baby-carriage," she said, and stooped to admire the baby.

"Won't you come in?" asked Mrs. Sweetser, her pretty face under the fluff of red-gold hair smiling at her unexpected guest. "It isn't a bit too early for me to receive callers. Come in a minute."

"I mustn't," said Grandma Willis, "I've left the door open, and there's only Nora, way out in the kitchen, and Louise has kept charging me I mustn't leave it open; it's so different here from what it is up in Burford. Why, I could leave my front door open all day, and nobody'd come in unless 'twas a neighbor. I just thought I'd tell you, my daughter-in-law's gone away, down South for three months, maybe more. I shall be alone a good deal" — Grandma Willis's laugh tinkled out. "I shall be alone 'most

all the time," she said. "I thought — I wondered if maybe you'd bring your sewing down sometime, and sit with me. Could you? or are you too busy?"

Mrs. Sweetser was a busy young woman; she was not only devoted to her handsome husband and her enchanting baby, but she had many outside interests as well; her college club, her musical club, and various charities connected with church, all absorbed part of her time for the daylight hours of every week. But as she looked at the sweet, hopeful old face of her new neighbor, she made an instant resolution; the hours must be stretched to make a little room for Grandma Willis, come what might.

"One can't ever be too busy to take time for one's friends," she said as she gave a last pat to the little hump in the robe which showed where a pair of rose-leaf feet were curled together. "You'd like me to run down, now and then, even if I had only a few minutes to spare, wouldn't you? as if I were a real neighbor, not just a city make-believe."

"If you would!" said Grandma Willis. "My, how I'd like it!"

"I will," and Mrs. Sweetser nodded her red-gold head emphatically. "I may do it this very afternoon. I won't say surely, but I may.

"If you'd seen that old darling's face when I said it," Mrs. Sweetser told her husband at dinner, "you'd have promised we'd give up the club and the opera and everything, and spend our evenings with her. I know you would!"

"Then don't let me see much of her," said Mr. Sweetser in mock alarm, "I wish to keep a few simple pleasures with which to refresh my soul when the baby's gone to sleep."

Grandma Willis ran down the stairs, and into her son's door. She hurried along past the parlor and her own room, past the dining-room where the breakfast dishes still stood on the table, out to the kitchen.

"Nora," she said to the back of the frowzly head, bent over the set-tubs at the far end of the room, "I'm going to clear the table and bring out the dishes. And Nora," as the broad face turned over one shoulder to look at her, "if that pretty Mrs. Sweetser comes at any time, morning or afternoon, to see me, and you

go to the door, you be sure to have her come in, no matter what I'm doing, won't you? I shouldn't ever want to miss her."

"Sure I'll never let her get away from the door if 'tis I goes to it," said Nora. "Times when my hands are in the bread or the washing, or I'm changing my dress, how will it be then?"

"I shall answer the door bell," said Grandma Willis eagerly. "I'll plan so I'll always be ready when you aren't, Nora. We'll get on first-rate, you and I."

"Sure we will," said Nora with great heartiness, as she put back a particularly drooping lock of hair with a soapy hand, and fell upon her task again. "We'll have no trouble at all."

"Henry, shall you mind if I get to know some of the people in the house, and they come to see me?" asked Grandma Willis that night, when the children had gone to bed, and she and her son were sitting together. "I mean Mrs. Sweetser, and maybe her husband; they're the only ones I know — yet. I asked her, before I thought, and then afterwards it came over me perhaps I ought not to have done it; it's your house and Louise's."

"You ask anybody you want," said Henry Willis. "Have as good a time as you can while you're in command, as you are now. This is your home while you're in it. They'd never trouble Louise; she has a way of freezing people out if she doesn't want them. Women seem to be able to do that. A man couldn't — not in his own house."

"Why, Henry," and Grandma Willis lifted a startled face to his, "Mr. Gorham Leeds — he said he was coming again last night — he didn't come after all."

"No, I shunted him off," said Henry Willis, "that is — I — he's coming to-night."

"To-night, dear?" said Grandma Willis, "why it's 'most ten o'clock now! Do you suppose he's forgotten it? It's too bad to keep you up late. You need your sleep; you're a real country boy that way."

"Oh, he probably won't stay long," said her son, with a glance at his watch. "And he's due now in a few minutes. I shall take him over into my den, so we shan't disturb anyone. You'd better trot off to bed now, mother. You aren't keeping good Burford hours."

She left him with a good-night kiss, and went to her room. In a few moments she heard the bell ring, lightly, as if it had been touched by careful fingers.

"He's thoughtful about not waking folks up, anyway," said Grandma Willis; "maybe he isn't so disagreeable as he appeared to Malcolm and me. There, they've gone into Henry's den and shut the door."

A vivid picture of the man's face rose before her.

"He looked the way Cass Fowler used to, when he was getting ready to foreclose his mortgage on somebody's farm," said Grandma Willis with sudden conviction. "He's got some hold on my Henry, that's what 'tis. If it's money — but how can it be money? look at this house they live in! and they have everything. Henry had a good start in life, and Louise told me herself he makes a large income. But he's worried."

She sat down in the rocking chair, drawing it close to her dressing stand. From one of the drawers she drew the small flat parcel which had lain in the bottom of her bag on the jour-

ney from Burford. She opened it, and took out the soft old hat, smoothing its creases with the loving fingers.

"'Bijah never kept troubles from me," she said. "I'm glad of that; troubles bring folks near, up in Burford. Here they don't seem to; they make a wall. I can't see through it, to help my boy on the other side of it; but maybe I can climb over. I'm going to try."

She folded the hat again, wrapped it and laid it away. She drew aside the curtains to take account of the outside world and its doings before going to bed.

"The glass stands below twenty," she said as she looked at the thermometer outside her window. "Pretty cold for the season. There! I know something I can do for Henry, same as if he'd come up to Burford. He loves it — always did from a boy."

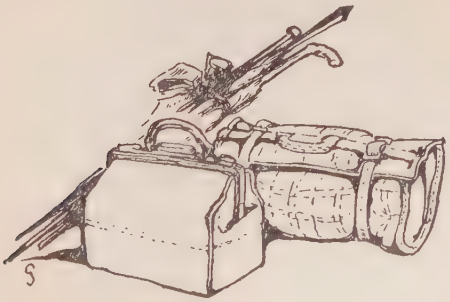
From another drawer she brought out a large hot-water bag and a little tin funnel. She tested the water in her little bath-room cautiously.

"Boiling!" she breathed, and in a minute

more the bag was filled, and slipped into a flannel case.

She stole out of her room and along to her son's on noiseless, slippered feet. She thrust the bag far down under the bed-clothes, and hurried back to her own door.

"There! You can't feel quite so miserable when you're warm enough, as you can when you're all of a shake with cold," said Grandma Willis. "Still talking in there, aren't they. Well, I've done all I can for to-night, excepting to say a little prayer for him. I guess I shan't forget that, but he won't know about it — and he will know about the hot-water bag."



CHAPTER X

THE next week was a much happier time for Grandma Willis than the one which had gone, in spite of the cloud which hung so persistently just out of her reach, yet low enough to cast its shadow on her son's face. She was busy, and had begun once more to feel that she was of some use. With Nora she planned the meals and the marketing; she dusted, brushed and polished to her heart's content; and she

brought out her mending basket and darning bag, put on her biggest apron with many pockets, and sat by her window, mending, rocking and humming to herself all one afternoon. Just at its close when daylight was fading, came Mrs. Sweetser, dressed for a walk.

"I'm going to meet my husband and make him take some exercise," she said, her eyes gleaming out from the shade of her big hat. "And I think I shall carry him to one of the picture galleries; he doesn't know much about pictures, but he's learning. I'm taking a great deal of pains with him," and she laughed mischievously. "He must be cultured, you know, in these days, even if he is a stock-broker."

Grandma Willis gazed at her with unaffected admiration and delight.

"You look sweet as a pink," she said; "I guess he'll be proud enough to go with you wherever you like. You have real good times together, don't you?"

The pretty face under the big hat grew prettier still as Grandma Willis gazed at it, waiting for her answer.

"We've always said we had the best times in

the world together, we two," said Mrs. Sweetser, with a little catch in her breath; "but now — now sometimes we hurry home to baby — for there are three of us to have what we *know* are the best times in the world, now."

"Yes, I know," said Grandma Willis. "I remember how 'twas when Henry was little; 'twas just that way. But you have money and pretty clothes and a beautiful home; we didn't have any of those things, nor concerts and plays to go to; love and youth, that was all we had; 'twas plenty too. Oh, yes, 'twas plenty!"

"I know you must have been very happy," said Mrs. Sweetser. "Nobody could look as you do, who hadn't been very happy, and loved."

"Oh, yes, dear," said Grandma Willis, "there couldn't have been anybody happier than I was, or better loved. Sometimes it 'most made me afraid, I was so happy; but when 'Bijah was taken away I saw why it had been so; it had got to last me for all time, for all the years till we could be together again. I'm glad," she added wistfully, unconscious that her words would carry any revelation of

the life in her son's home, "I'm so glad there are young folks starting out on their life's journey together, even here, in this big city where things seem to run past before you can catch at them, that love their home the way my 'Bijah and I did."

"Why, of course there are, you dear thing!" and the guest stooped impulsively to kiss the wistful face. "I really stopped to ask when you and I are to have our shopping excursion. Could you go to-morrow?" she asked after a minute.

"I'd love to," said Grandma Willis. "I have to get a dress for Dorothy to wear to her dancing-school party. Perhaps you'd help me. I've got to have advice."

"It would be great fun for me," said Mrs. Sweetser; "I've always been sorry I had no little sister whose dresses I might help choose. What time will Dorothy be free to go with us?"

"I'm not sure whether she has any extra lessons to-morrow or not," said Grandma Willis; "little folks here seem to have full as many things to do out of school as in, and I haven't fixed them in my mind, yet."

"You find out and let me know, and then I'll order the carriage for whatever time you say," Mrs. Sweetser told her, and hurried off to meet her husband.

In the elevator she heard a piece of news from Jim, who admired her greatly, and ran the car as slowly as possible.

"Say, Mrs. Sweetser, did you know Mrs. Rankin, that lives in the suite opposite the Willis's, has come back?" he asked. "Yes'm, she's been away in California for a year; she's the one that owns all those patents you know — all kinds of things. She's got piles of money, but she's awful hard to please. Say, I'd like to see her and Mr. Willis's mother side of each other. Larry and I choose the old lady Willis for ours every time. She's a peach!"

"She certainly is," and Mrs. Sweetser laughed, as Jim's flow of language ceased. "You and Larry have good taste."

"She's a peach herself," said Jim as he and Larry stood looking after her, their faces pressed against the glass. "Look at that figure and those clothes. It's queer Mrs. Willis hasn't got on to her yet; just because she came

from Ohio. I'll bet when she finds out who Mrs. Sweetser's father was she'll be ready to kick herself. She don't read the papers thoroughly, that's the trouble with her."

When Grandma Willis broached the matter of the shopping excursion to Dorothy, instead of the excuses she had expected to hear, the child's face was smiling, and her words were sweet as honey.

"I can go any time Mrs. Sweetser would like to have me, grandmother," she said. "I think it's very kind of her. Don't you think she's very pretty, grandmother? And she's so stylish."

"I know she's pretty, dearie," said Grandma Willis, "and her clothes do fit beautifully, and they look so fresh and as if they'd been chosen real carefully. Yes, I suppose I should have known she's stylish, if I'd been asked."

Dorothy shrugged her shoulders, and spoke in a tone of condescension which sent Malcolm into a spasm of coughing.

"It's something you can't explain — style," she said, and her grandmother seemed to see the child's mother looking out through her eyes.

The next afternoon Grandma Willis saw her granddaughter in still another mood. A more demure and modest little maid it would have been hard to find. It seemed that Dorothy had scarcely a wish in the world save to defer to her grandmother's judgment, guided as it was by Mrs. Sweetser. She stood like a meek little marionette while her elders discussed and weighed the worth and attractions of the pretty white gowns which the obsequious saleswoman hooked and unhooked up and down the child's back, murmuring words of flattery. Dorothy's eyes had a far-away, dreamy look which almost deceived her grandmother.

The same shrewd sense which enabled Grandma Willis, fresh from Burford, to tell the best material from that not so good in the little fluffy gowns spread before her, helped her to see through the small actress on whom the gowns were slipped one after another.

"She's playing, that's what she's doing," said Grandma Willis to herself with mingled distaste and amusement. "She knows every tuck and ruffle in those dresses better than Mrs. Sweetser or I do, I'll warrant. She's trying to

make an impression, same as grown folks do sometimes."

The impression was successful; Mrs. Sweetser who had scarcely seen the child until that day, was charmed with her daintiness and grace, her sweet voice and her gentle, demure ways; most of all she was delighted with Dorothy's instant acceptance of the choice made by her grandmother at last.

"It is so much simpler than many of the others," said Mrs. Sweetser when they were driving home together, after dropping Dorothy at the house of a friend who was having a dolls' fair, "and children love furbelows; the fact that the lace was better and the material finer, of course she couldn't have known."

"H'm, I s'pose not," said Grandma Willis, but her eyes twinkled at her thoughts.

That night at dinner Dorothy had so much to say in praise of Mrs. Sweetser that Malcolm grinned derisively, and made various teasing remarks to which Dorothy turned a deaf ear.

"Grandmother and I think she is lovely, don't we, grandmother?" and Dorothy assumed an air of joint proprietorship with Grandma

Willis in her new friend, which caused Malcolm to beat a tattoo on the table, bringing down on his head a reproof from his father who was eating in moody silence.

Two days later, when Henry Willis had gone away again, Dorothy tapped on her grandmother's door, and being instantly and joyfully welcomed, unfolded a plan of her own concoction.

"Grandmother," she said in her sweetest, most coaxing tone, "don't you think, as long as Mrs. Sweetser was so kind about my dress, it would be polite to invite her to go to the party? She said she loved dancing."

"Why, I think it would be the very nicest thing that could happen," said Grandma Willis, drawing the child close to her. "I'm so pleased that you thought of it, dearie. Shall we go right up now and ask her?"

Dorothy hesitated for an instant.

"I don't think she is at home," she said, smoothing her grandmother's apron. "I saw her getting into Mrs. Raymond's automobile just now as I came into the house. The Raymonds are very rich people; Margaret goes to

my school; she's two or three years older than I am, and she's very exclusive."

"Exclusive," echoed Grandma Willis, laughing. "I guess you've got the wrong word, dearie, haven't you? I don't believe you know exactly what exclusive means, do you? It's a pretty big word for a little girl."

"I know exactly what it means," the child informed her coolly. "It's a word that is used a great deal, grandmother, in society, and in my school."

"Mercy me, is it?" said Grandma Willis helplessly. "Well, dearie, we can run up a minute this evening before your bed-time."

"You don't need to go, you know, grandmother, if you're busy," said Dorothy sweetly. "I can just as well go alone."

"So you could," said her grandmother slowly; "why, so you could. Maybe you'd like to do it alone; and I do help Nora a little after dinner, generally. You go up by yourself, dearie, if I'm busy."

The invitation was given by Dorothy alone, and accepted, but when Mrs. Sweetser came down on Saturday to ask if she and her hus-

band might again have the pleasure of a guest in their pew, her manner of speaking of the child was quite different, and had no trace of enthusiasm. If Grandma Willis had heard Mrs. Sweetser's indignant words to her husband, she would have been speedily enlightened as to the cause of this change.

"That little minx of the Willis's has asked me to go with her grandmother to the dancing-school party," Mrs. Sweetser announced, on her return to her husband after the interview with Dorothy.

"Minx," said Mr. Sweetser with raised eyebrows. "Can that be the adorable little angel of whom I've heard you speak?"

"She's no angel," said Mrs. Sweetser with heightened color. "After I'd accepted the invitation she said with her long lashes dropped to cover her eyes, 'Grandmother is so very countrified, Mrs. Sweetser; I hope you won't be ashamed to go with her.' Why, I was so angry I couldn't speak! That darling old woman to be criticised and made fun of by that little snip! and while I was too choking with indignation to answer, she laughed and said,

'Mother was so amused by her!' and thanked me once more and ran off!"

"Keep cool, my dear," said Mr. Sweetser; "what could you expect of the child? Her father isn't a cad, I imagine, but he probably laughs at her airs, and the mother — you know from Mrs. Raymond what she is — a foolish, selfish climber."

Nothing of this came to the ears of Grandma Willis, who was a little puzzled at the change in Mrs. Sweetser's tone when she spoke of Dorothy, but warmed by the frank liking her new friend showed for her. In the days that followed Mrs. Sweetser found time to run in often on her way to or from her various engagements. Two or three afternoons she carried Grandma Willis upstairs with her for a cup of tea; and on one of those occasions Mrs. Faulkner, a pleasant, middle-aged woman, and Mrs. Desmond, a sparkling young person with a vivacious manner and high-pitched voice, were there, sipping their tea and discussing domestic troubles.

"This is Mrs. Faulkner, who lives opposite us, Mrs. Willis," said the pretty hostess as she

ushered her last guest into the parlor, "and this is Mrs. Desmond, who lives above us. They are neighbors of yours and mine, and I thought you'd be glad to meet them."

Grandma Willis held out her hand to first one and then the other, her lips parted, her eyes shining with delight.

"Well, there, I am pleased as pleased can be to see you," she said happily. "Seemed as if I was a long time getting acquainted with my city neighbors, but here are three of you now, that I can speak to by name, and I've made friends this very morning with the lady on the first floor, only she's pretty deaf and didn't have her hearing instrument with her, so we couldn't have much conversation; but she's asked me to call and see her some day."

"What a triumph!" cried Mrs. Desmond. "She's never asked one of us, has she, Mrs. Sweetser?"

"Not me," said Mrs. Sweetser with a laugh.

"Nor me," said Mrs. Faulkner. "But you see everybody wants a call from you, Mrs. Willis. And Mrs. Sweetser has been telling us that you've come from the country, so short a time

ago that you haven't had much opportunity yet to make friends, so Mrs. Desmond and I are planning to be among the first. We're going to call on you to-morrow."

"Now that's just the way 'twould be in Burford," said Grandma Willis; "any stranger that comes, we like to call soon as we know about their being in town. I'd begun to think 'twas different in the city. I'm so glad 'tisn't, except of course folks being so busy they don't always realize when there are strangers right amongst them. The way I happened to speak to that Mrs. Keating, the deaf lady, was because she tripped on her dress and ripped the braid off it, when she was just ready to start off in her carriage, in a hurry, and I was coming in from the Park where I'd been taking a walk. I saw how 'twas, so I took my little pinball that I always carry, out of my bag; it has black pins half way round, white the other half — and asked her if I couldn't pin it up right there in the hall, and she let me; that's the way it was."

"Of course she let you," and Mrs. Sweetser appealed to her other guests, who nodded and laughed.

"Of course she did," said Mrs. Desmond. "But there's one person I'm afraid even you can't turn into a neighbor, Mrs. Willis. That's Mrs. Rankin, who lives opposite you. Have you caught a glimpse of her yet?"

"No, I haven't," said Grandma Willis regretfully, "and Jim Halloran says she doesn't like folks — or didn't before she went away. Maybe travelling's changed her. She's been to California."

"I'm afraid that won't do," said Mr. Sweetser who had come home and into the room in time to hear the last remark. "Mrs. Rankin has travelled all her life. I think you'll have to give her up."

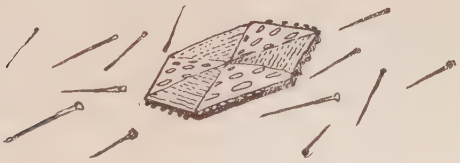
But when, half an hour later, Grandma Willis went downstairs, Jim Halloran stood in the elevator, door open, watching for her.

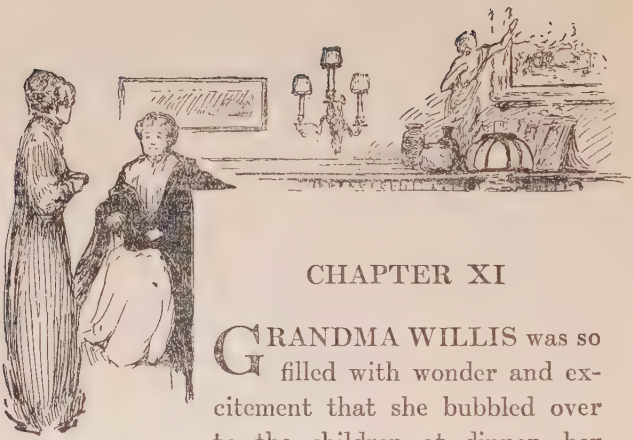
"Say, Mrs. Willis," he began eagerly, "I've been holding the elevator here ten minutes hoping you'd come down before anybody rang; Nora told me where you were. You know that salve you gave me to put on my hand where I'd hurt it?"

"Yes," said Grandma Willis, "and it worked

well, same as it always does, by what you said."

"Yes," said Jim, "it did, fine and dandy! Well, I told Mrs. Rankin about it, for she noticed my hand was done up, and — there goes the bell; well, let 'em wait a minute — and I showed her the little box of it and — Gee! they're in an awful hurry! — and she wants you to come and tell her about it!" finished Jim as he shot the door across and passed from sight.





CHAPTER XI

GRANDMA WILLIS was so filled with wonder and excitement that she bubbled over to the children at dinner, her son not being there to receive her confidence. Malcolm was much interested and asked a great many questions, few of which she was able to answer.

"I haven't ever seen her, Malcolm," she said again and again. "I don't know whether she's tall or short or anything about her except she wants to see me on account of my salve. Well there, I hope she doesn't think it'll do more than 'twill."

"If she has any rheumatism or neuralgia I can't claim 'twill do more than just ease the pain for a little while;" and she looked dis-

tressed at the thought that she might have to disappoint a sufferer from such ills.

Even Dorothy condescended to express her interest. The wealth and eccentricity of the holder of many patents were known to her through the conversation of the sprightly Cecilia, whom little in the way of gossip ever escaped. As for Nora, she was all a-tingle with curiosity and pride.

"Jim told me about it," she said, "and 'tis the only time in the four years she's lived here, since he came, a mite of a boy, to run the elevator, that she's ever asked about a soul in the house — he says. Will you be going to see her to-morrow morning, or when?"

"I'll ask Jim what would be the best time," said Grandma Willis, and Jim being consulted, gave the opinion that next morning would be the very best time.

"What shall you wear, grandmother?" inquired Dorothy.

"Wear?" and Grandma Willis looked puzzled. "Why, she won't care what clothes I have on, dearie; it's my salve she wants to know about, not me."

The next morning, when her dusting was done, she washed her hands, smoothed her hair, took off her apron, and stepped across the hall in her sprigged morning gown. Her ring was answered almost instantly by a tall, severe-looking woman who held the door open two inches and received the message through the inhospitable crack thus afforded her.

"Mrs. Willis, from across the hall, to speak about salve," she repeated with unchanging austerity of aspect. "I will tell Mrs. Rankin."

The crack vanished, the lock clicked and Grandma Willis, a box of the precious salve in her hands, was left to look at the closed door.

"I guess maybe I've come too early," she said; "that woman didn't seem to be prepared to let me in; perhaps Mrs. Rankin hasn't thought to tell her I was expected 'most any time."

The door opened while she was cogitating, opened wide the second time, and the severe-looking woman led the way across the inner hall to the room which corresponded to Henry Willis's den. No greater contrast could well be imagined than that shown by the two rooms,

counterparts though they were in size and shape. In one the odds and ends of half-worn furniture, the big, clumsy desk, the odor of stale tobacco; the walls bare save for maps and time-tables and two or three highly-colored prints in gilt frames. The walls were washable, but the maps and time-tables pasted or glued on it were often torn down between washing times. The picture of that untidy room which she was forbidden to set in order, rose vividly before Grandma Willis as she entered Mrs. Rankin's little reception-room.

She could not know the value of the paintings, so carefully selected by Mrs. Rankin's adviser, which hung on the walls, nor could she guess the worth of the etchings which lined the hall through which she had passed, but she felt the indefinable atmosphere of wealth and good taste which surrounded her. She looked about her with the delight of a child.

"Why, I didn't s'pose 'twould be like this!" she breathed, finding herself left alone in the beautiful room, the servant having departed on noiseless feet. "It's like the places I've seen pictured out in the magazines, only you don't

get the colors there. Seems as if I was in some kind of a wood, all green and shady, like where you'd sit down to rest, and look at the tree tops and the sky; and there they are, right in that picture."

"Why don't you sit down, then?" asked someone who had come in the door behind her.

Grandma Willis turned quickly, and gave an apologetic little laugh.

"I must have been thinking out loud," she said. "It's the most beautiful room I ever saw, and it took me by surprise."

"I see it did," said Mrs. Rankin. "Will you kindly sit over there?" and she indicated a chair which brought the face of her guest into strong light while the one into which she sank left her in the shadow. "I crave the indulgence of this special seat, always, as I have a weak back, and this chair suits it."

Grandma Willis saw, before the shadow made it less distinct, a face of unusual strength. The keen eyes set rather close together, the long straight nose, the large mouth, heavily moulded chin and high forehead made rather a strange combination, but one which conveyed to

the person who saw it for the first time an impression of indomitable will and courage. It was a face over which both grief and pain had worn their way, and in which bitterness had cut its lines. Grandma Willis saw it; then her heart gave a great throb; more than the face she had seen before Mrs. Rankin's chair, set in the shadow, concealed the short, squarely built figure; her back, piteously misshapen, was hidden in its velvet arch.

"Jim didn't tell me," thought Grandma Willis; "I don't believe he knows. He said she always wore a long cloak and her servant was always close behind her like a shadow. What can she want of my salve, poor thing? He never would have called her cross if he'd known what she had to bear."

She was quite unconscious that her heart spoke through her eyes. Her hostess sat, peering at her like a sibyl, waiting for her next words.

"I've brought you a box of my salve," said Grandma Willis gently, "same as I gave Jim. If you get a cut or a bruise or a burn, anything like that, it's always helped folks. I

make it myself, up in Burford, that's my home. I'm just stopping here awhile, looking after my son and the children, on account of his wife's nerves. She's gone away now for a rest, and I'm keeping house alone. I could make more of the salve if 'twas needed, now there's only Nora in the kitchen. 'Tis an old recipe handed down from my grandmother; she was a natural doctor, folks said; she knew the uses of all herbs and such, and how things went together. I've got her old mortar and pestle up home in one o' my cupboards. Mother always kept the recipe secret and told me to, so I have, but I'll have to leave it to somebody when my time comes. I had thought my little granddaughter would be the one to have it; but I don't much believe she'd want it."

Grandma Willis had not by any means said this without stopping to take breath; she had made several pauses, but still the sibyl remained silent, her hands on the arms of her big chair; her eyes on her guest. Grandma Willis changed her position and began again, her voice rather tremulous.

"It was the salve you wanted to know about,

wasn't it?" she ventured. "Jim thought so."

"Yes," the voice came at last; "that was it. Also I wished to see what you could be like — a woman who would give a box of salve to an elevator boy and bandage his hand for him."

"Why!" Grandma Willis was shocked out of her restraint. "Wouldn't *anybody* have done it? Of course they would. 'Twas only I happened to be the first one to ride in the elevator after he'd hurt his hand; 'twasn't a bad cut, but it needed to be looked after right off. *You'd* have done it. Jim told me you noticed his bandage."

"What do you charge for the salve when you are not treating charity patients?" asked Mrs. Rankin.

"Charge!" there was no mistaking the reproach and amazement in the voice of her visitor; Mrs. Rankin, through her veil of bitterness saw that the brown eyes were filled and brimming from the hurt. "Did you think I *sold* it to folks?" asked Grandma Willis.

"Why not?" questioned Mrs. Rankin dryly; "most things of value are to be bought and

sold, in this world; what you get for nothing is generally worth nothing."

"Maybe that's the way in cities, where it costs so much to live," said Grandma Willis with gentle dignity, "but 'tisn't our country way. Anybody that has anything to help others is 'most always glad to give it to them. Of course now and then there's somebody who's close and stingy; has a kind of a sickness of the soul, as our minister says; but 'tisn't often. And my salve — why, the materials don't cost much, and my time isn't worth anything special, and 'Bijah, my husband, made me dozens of suitable little boxes when he was running the wooden mill. Like this one; you see what they are. I was hoping you'd accept this," and she held the box toward her hostess, bending forward eagerly.

"Did it never occur to you that the formula, the recipe as you call it, is valuable?" asked Mrs. Rankin.

"Why, of course I know 'tis," said Grandma Willis; "it's helped a great many folks. Everybody in the towns 'round Burford knows about it; it's quite famous up there. 'Grand-

ma Willis's Salve' they call it; I've been known as grandma for years and years; it comes from my being so fond of children, I s'pose. The druggist over to Hobartville always tells me he hasn't a salve that's equal to mine; but then he's an old friend, and likes to make me feel good."

"I mean this —" Mrs. Rankin leaned forward in her chair careless for the moment of any revelation her change of attitude would make. "I mean, has it never occurred to you that you could sell the formula, have it protected by a patent, and manufactured so that it would help people all over the country; perhaps all over the world?"

One part of this question made instant appeal to Grandma Willis. Her eyes shone and her cheeks burned, as she too leaned forward; the two faces so near in age, so unlike in everything else, were almost close together.

"In the mines where they have dreadful accidents," she said eagerly, "and in hot countries where our soldiers have to go sometimes, and get burned; and for folks that go seeking knowledge way up North, and suffer frostbites and worse! Oh, I've often wished I knew

how to get it to them when I'd read what they've had to endure, but I never knew how. Once I asked Henry, my son, but he seemed to think right around home was all I'd better try. But 'tis a wonderful remedy for all such things, Mrs. Rankin."

"I haven't a doubt of it;" the woman in the big arched chair fell back into its shadow. "Well," she said, "I am surprised that your son did not see it's possibilities. For how much will you sell the formula to me?"

"Could I go on making it myself, just the same, for the folks at home and others?" asked Grandma Willis. "I couldn't do that, if 'twas patented, could I?"

"No," said Mrs. Rankin, "but I could agree to have a certain number of boxes at your disposal every year as long as you live; it might be put in the contract between us; better to have things in black and white, always. On my death, all my property will go to a charity in which I am interested, as I have no heirs. You see the salve would go on and on, doing good."

"I can't seem to think what to do about it," said Grandma Willis, pushing back the hair

from her forehead, and holding her hands clasped over her eyes for a moment. "What you say is wonderful! It's 'most too good to be true. I s'pose I ought to do it. The only thing is — I'd miss the making it. 'Bijah used to help me. When I begin on it, every time, it carries me back."

She rose suddenly, laying her little box on Mrs. Rankin's lap.

"I'll have to think it over, all by myself," she said slowly. "All by myself; nobody can help me decide this. You're kind as you can be to think of it; to give me such a chance of helping folks, everywhere. I'm 'most sure what my answer'll be, but I'll have to take a little time. Don't you get up for me. You sit right where you are. I'll let you know, soon as I decide."

"And the price," Mrs. Rankin said, raising her voice as the little figure passed over the threshold. "Let me know that."

But Grandma Willis did not hear her. She was feeling, blindly, for the knob of the door which would let her out into the hall where she might stand for a moment before seeing Nora

— Nora, who was eagerly awaiting her return, she knew, full of pride and curiosity.

"If I could just get out where it's cool and still, and think," she said, as she crossed the hall when the moment was gone and her eyes had been hastily dried. "'Twas warm in that room; I couldn't seem to think."

When she had let herself in at her son's door near which Nora was dusting and redusting the hall table, she found the way made easy for her.

"Did you have a grand time?" asked Nora. "Your cheeks are red as fire, ma'am. Sure, I suppose the old lady keeps it up to ninety in those rooms o' hers; they say she's a cold body, always wrapped up like a mummy when she goes out, no matter what the weather is."

"It was pretty warm there, Nora," said Grandma Willis. "I've been thinking I'd slip on another skirt and my coat, and go for a little walk in the Park, then I'll tell you about my visit when I come back, though there isn't a great deal to tell. She was very kind; and it's a beautiful room, the one where I went."

"You go right along, ma'am," said Nora.

"You've been staying in the house too much, I'm thinking. When you come back will be time enough for me to hear."

She helped Grandma Willis fasten her thick skirt, and put on her coat, noting as she did so the trembling of the little fingers, usually so deft and steady. She escorted her to the door and gave her a pat on the shoulder, full of the affection and sympathy she could not well have put into words.

Grandma Willis did not take the elevator; she wished to avoid even Jim and Larry. Down the stairs she went softly, across the entrance hall and out through the big door. The elevator was at the top of the house, and Larry was with the janitor at the moment. Her flight was unnoticed, though her breath came fast till she was out on the street.

She smiled up at the big policeman, and gave him a "good-morning" as he touched his hat. He piloted her across to the Park, and watched her for an instant as she hurried to its shelter.

"I wonder what's happened to the old lady," he thought; but traffic was thick that morning, and he had little time to waste in musing.

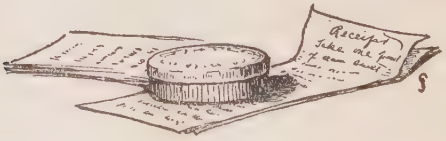
In the Park, Grandma Willis fled down a path she knew, as if she were hurrying away from someone. Yet through her mind one thought beat its way, again and again.

"If there was anybody that would understand! If there was anybody I could talk to that would understand!" over, and over and over again, it came.

And then, at a turn in the path, she halted. Coming toward her with pleasure which changed to solicitude in his glance as he saw her eyes, full of trouble, was Judge Holcomb.

"I want you to help me," said Grandma Willis, as he took her hand. "I believe you're the very one that can help me. I'm so glad you're here. Have you time? Could I walk along with you a little way?"

"As long and far as you like to walk, I am at your service," said the judge. "Which path shall we take?"



CHAPTER XII

FOR half an hour they walked and talked; and for another half hour they sat on a sunny bench, and the judge did most of the talking, while Grandma Willis listened, now and then answering a question as best she could. To this new old friend she had told her perplexities and fears with a freedom which astonished herself.

"I don't know how 'tis," she said at last, "but I seem to feel as if you'd be just the one to tell me what to do; I guess you're used to helping folks out o' their doubts and troubles, aren't you?"

"I'm used to giving advice," and the judge permitted himself to smile at her. The story she had told, though it had moved him through her innocent troubled recital, was essentially an old story to him; the family life with its lack

of sincerity and sweetness, the scheming husband and ambitious wife who had grown apart, if they had ever been close together; the man who had lost the simplicity and frankness of his early life, but in whom his mother's heart still centred, whose business she did not comprehend but whose distraction and something else, akin to fear, she clearly saw — all this was familiar enough to the judge. It gave him a sort of mental nausea to think of the little old country woman, living in the midst of it, unsmirched but not untroubled.

The matter of the salve both interested and amused him. He knew of Mrs. Rankin's many successful patents, and her wish to acquire more; he also knew that the salve under her skilled management might be made to yield a moderate, steady income; part of this he craved for his new friend, that she might have opportunities for giving the help which money, well applied, can bring; she had told him of some Burford neighbors who needed such help. Perhaps Mrs. Rankin might be searching out the fibre of Grandma Willis, and had a half-formulated plan of philanthropy. He led

Grandma Willis away from the maze of perplexity in which the thought of her son involved her, to the consideration of feasible plans. He was rewarded by the straightening of her back, and a little spot of brighter color in her cheeks.

"Do you mean it could be fixed so I could still have a share in it, and could give it where and when I saw fit?" she asked him, trembling with eagerness. "You mean maybe she'd take me in as a partner? Why, Judge Holcomb, I haven't any money to invest, you understand. 'Bijah left me just comfortable; that was all he could do; I have to count my pennies pretty close, to be able to do a little for other folks now and then, same as anybody wants to."

"You have the formula for the salve," the judge reminded her. "You won't need any charity from her. Wait a week or two; and then suggest what I've told you. I'll write it down, and send it to you, so you'll have it under your fingers, where you can refer to it. She's a good business woman; she'll see your point."

"Your point, you mean," Grandma Willis

corrected him. "I never supposed there was any such way out of it. My! there are things I could do if I had a little extra! There's a girl up home that has a talent for painting, and there's no chance for her to study the way she ought to. If I could pay for that! Do you s'pose I'd get enough to help her?"

"I think it is quite probable you would," said the judge. "Now, Mrs. Willis, I have one more suggestion to make. Don't tell anyone, not even your son, when he comes home, about this matter until it is all settled; keep it for a surprise; that is my last bit of advice to you."

"I'll do just as you say;" Grandma Willis rose and held out her hand; "anybody that's been as good to me as you have! I don't know how to thank you!"

"Thank me by letting me know how the affair goes on," said Judge Holcomb; "it will be very interesting to me."

All her life Grandma Willis had kept secrets for other people. She was used to being the recipient of confidences from young and old. The love affairs of Burford were usually an old

story to her by the time others knew of them; she not only kept secrets well, but she had the gift and grace, still more rare, never to boast of her foreknowledge or let it be guessed by any air of superiority. But her own secrets had been few and simple. This matter with which she was now weighted, was undoubtedly important; she felt its gravity, and yet the knowledge of it lent a spring to her heels and brightness to her cheeks which had been sometimes lacking in the days since she left her home.

To Nora first, and later to Dorothy and Malcolm she told enough of her visit to satisfy their curiosity. She told them that Mrs. Rankin was evidently far from well.

"Her back is all stooped over," said Grandma Willis, knowing that her country phrase would serve to hide the cruel truth she could not bring herself to reveal. "She's been a sufferer for years, I can tell by her face."

"What do you s'pose she thinks your salve will do for her, grandma?" asked Malcolm.

Grandma Willis hesitated.

"I don't exactly know what she thinks it will

do for her," she said; "but she's real interested to hear about it. I left her a box."

"Did she invite you to call again?" asked Dorothy.

"Oh, yes," said Grandma Willis, "she's expecting me to come again. She doesn't ever make calls herself, she told me."

Henry Willis was at home for only two evenings at the end of the week, and no mention was made of Mrs. Rankin or the visit. He was in a strange mood, silent and abstracted, with an indifference to all about him, broken once by a gust of temper roused by a trifle, and once again by a passing moment of tenderness for his mother.

"Your cheeks aren't as bright as I like to see them," he told her at the breakfast table, suddenly rousing himself to look across at her. "Why don't you go out to drive every day? Have Patrick put down the window, so you'll get the air."

"I don't seem to care much about driving, just to drive," said Grandma Willis; "you don't mind if I don't go, do you?"

"Mind? — no," said her son; "but if you

won't drive you ought to walk. Make the children take you. I can't have you wilt, as if I'd torn you up by the roots. That's the way I shall feel if you grow pale."

"There's too much Burford soil clinging to my roots for me to wilt for one while," said Grandma Willis briskly. "Don't you fret, boy."

His stay was quickly over, and his going brought a sense of relief to the household, loth though Grandma Willis was to confess it.

"I'm glad father's gone away again," said Dorothy with a shrug of her dainty shoulders at breakfast, the morning of his departure. "It's a great deal nicer just to have you, grandmother. You're so pleasant all the time," and leaving her seat, she presented her cheek to be kissed before going out of the room to make herself ready for school.

"Well," thought Grandma Willis with a little smile, as she reflected on this crumb of approval, "it's something to have her think I'm pleasant. It took me aback so I didn't tell her 'twasn't right to feel that way about her father. Poor Henry! I wish I knew what's

troubling him. But all I can do to help, till he tells me, is to keep things running smooth as I can here."

They ran very smoothly and very easily for the next fortnight. Furthermore there were many sunshiny hours for Grandma Willis. The neighbors from above her came down to see her several times; breezy Mrs. Desmond with a gay sofa cushion she was embroidering for her brother at college, Mrs. Faulkner with some exquisite needlework she had for her winter's play, she said. One afternoon Mrs. Keating sent her maid up to ask if Grandma Willis had leisure to make her a call. It proved that Mrs. Keating, like Mrs. Sanderson's old father, could read Grandma Willis's words from her lips with so little trouble that the tiresome instrument, generally so indispensable, was laid aside. Mrs. Sweetser ran in almost every day, sometimes with the baby, sometimes alone; and one evening she brought her husband, who had a wooden block puzzle to show their neighbor.

"It has defied both my wife and me," said Mr. Sweetser, "so we've brought it to you. I won't tell you what my wife said about the im-

possibility of anything's resisting you, for it might embarrass you."

Grandma Willis laughed at him, as she took the six curiously shaped blocks.

"Why, when I was a girl there used to be a puzzle just about like this," she said; "there was a little knack to it; you had to take two that —" her voice trailed off, as she turned her back on the company, bending over a small table.

There were two or three sharp clicks, and then she faced about, the completed puzzle, a perfect cube, held out for inspection.

"You're a witch," said Mr. Sweetser, shaking his head at her; "that's what you are. Let me look at that."

When the Sweetser's had gone, Dorothy gazed at her grandmother, her delicate brows drawn together.

"You know a good many things, grandmother," she remarked thoughtfully.

"I've lived a good many years, dearie," said Grandma Willis. "Folks can't help learning something now and then, unless they keep their eyes shut. You show me that pretty dance

you're going to do next week at the party, just before you run off to bed. I'll set the chairs against the wall, so you'll have plenty of room."

When the dance was over and Dorothy leaned against her grandmother for a moment, she thought it an excellent time to ask something which had been on the tip of her tongue all evening.

"Grandmother, would you mind if I went to the Allen's for Thanksgiving Day?" she asked in her sweetest tone, patting the soft old cheek with her little hand. "Mrs. Allen is a great friend of mother's, and as long as mother is away, she thought it would be nice for me to go to their house, so Elinor and I could be together."

"But your father, dearie," said Grandma Willis; "will he like it, to have you away from home such a day?"

"I think father won't be here," said Dorothy. "I asked him, and he said he couldn't arrange his business to accommodate holidays. Last year he wasn't at home. May I go, grandmother?"

Grandma Willis sat very still. She felt suddenly tired and old. She roused herself with an effort to answer the child who stood tapping her foot impatiently.

"Yes, dearie, if you'll have a better time, you go," she said slowly. "Malcolm will stay home with me, I guess, won't you, Malcolm?"

The boy had been watching her, having raised his head from his book to listen when Dorothy made her request. He had come into the room just as the dance ended, and ensconced himself in a corner. At his grandmother's question he rose, flinging his book on the chair and went to her. He did not look at Dorothy.

"Grandma," he said, "may I have Lester Barnard to dinner, Thanksgiving Day? You know he's the boy I've told you about whose father and mother have both died, and he lives with his guardian. He told me the other day that Thanksgiving his guardian takes him to his club for dinner and it's awfully stupid for Lester. I'd like to ask him here, if you're willing."

"Why, that rich boy is used—" began Dorothy, but Malcolm turned on her.

"Look here, this is not your party," he said bluntly; "you keep still."

"I'd love to have him come, Malcolm," said Grandma Willis. "We'll have a real old-fashioned Thanksgiving dinner; wouldn't he like that?"

"He will like it," said Malcolm in the tone of one who will see to it that things turn out as he has promised. "All right, grandma, thank you," and Malcolm returned to his corner and his book.

From that night until the afternoon of the dancing-school party Dorothy wore a chastened air. Her grandmother suspected, and with reason, that the child would have liked to take back her request and stay at home, with such a desirable young guest as Malcolm had invited. But there was no opportunity for her to do so. Malcolm gave the invitation by telephone that very evening in a clear tone which carried to Dorothy's ears as she went along the hall to her room.

"It's just my grandmother and I — not another person," he said in answer to a question from his friend. "No girls — no, indeed!

I shouldn't have asked you if there'd been any girls bothering 'round. You'll come? That's dandy!"

The road to retreat being closed to Dorothy she made the best of her bargain. The fears she had felt in regard to her grandmother's appearance returned when the day of the party arrived, but after all they proved unnecessary. Her father had ordered a great bunch of pink and white sweet peas for Grandma Willis, and Mrs. Sweetser pinned them on for her in the dressing-room when they arrived at the hall. She loosened their stems, and spread them so that they nodded and swayed against the black silk waist, stretching their heads to touch the white lace of the modest square neck, and to send a little pink glow to the chin above it.

At the first opportunity after the party had begun Dorothy stole a cautious glance toward the side of the room to which Mrs. Sweetser and her grandmother had gone. What she saw made her stare so long that at last her partner grew impatient.

"What's the matter with you, Dorothy?" he asked. "If you want to see the old lady in

the corner that everybody's asking about, you'll have to wait. My mother's hiding her; she and Mrs. Raymond."

Mrs. Sweetser had planned a triumph for Grandma Willis, and she carried it out. Mrs. Raymond, with more money and leisure than she knew how to use to advantage, was ever on the lookout for new sensations. The first glimpse of the sweet old face, with its look of childlike pleasure and interest, smiling above the nodding "pink ladies," charmed her. "Introduce me this minute," she said to Mrs. Sweetser, and her friend, smiling inwardly, complied.

"Did you walk right out of a country garden? How did you get here?" demanded Mrs. Raymond, who was accustomed to say whatever came into her mind on all occasions.

"Do you mean there are burrs and thorns sticking to me?" asked Grandma Willis, her eyes alight with amusement. "That's all you'd find in my garden at home, now; 'less my cosmos bush has held out better than usual. The man that sold it to me, told more'n the truth about it. But there! it was raining hard, and 'twas his last one!"

She laughed, and the first silvery tinkling note captured the heart of her fashionable listener.

"Please tell me all about it," she coaxed, and seated herself close to Grandma Willis, not stirring from her place till the party was over, and Dorothy, her arms full of favors, stood at her grandmother's side. Mrs. Raymond looked at her, carelessly.

"Did you enjoy the dancing, Mrs. Raymond?" asked the child.

"The dancing?" Mrs. Raymond smiled over Dorothy's head. "I'm afraid I haven't noticed it very much," she said. "I came, because one of my little nieces asked me, really; but I only meant to spend a few moments here. Your grandmother has been the lodestone to keep me." She turned and held out her hand to Grandma Willis. "I shall come to see you very soon," she said. "I feel as if I had been defrauded, not to have met you before."

On the way home Mrs. Sweetser's laugh rippled out several times with no apparent cause. Grandma Willis, happy but a little puzzled, sat with Dorothy's hand in hers, pat-

ting it gently. The child sat quietly and let her grandmother have her way.

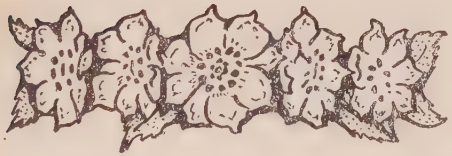
"'Twas a pretty party," said Grandma Willis; "a pretty party. I couldn't see all the dancing, because those ladies that came to speak to you, Mrs. Sweetser, when you introduced them to me, they stood between me and the children, sometimes, talking. I suppose they've seen a good many such parties before, and didn't realize how new 'twas to me; and being a stranger so, they wanted to be extra polite to me. And that Mrs. Raymond was as friendly as if she'd known me all my days. She says she's coming to see me real often, and tell me all about her children. Why, she's just like Burford folks!"

Mrs. Sweetser's laugh rippled out again.

"She'll come," she said. "She'll do all that she promised, and a great deal more."

"She asked me if Louise was to be gone quite a while," said Grandma Willis — "a number of them asked me that. They seemed real interested, and then they all said they'd come and see me while she's away, so I wouldn't have a chance to get lonesome. And to think that

those first days I thought the city was a place where folks didn't care much about strangers! Well, there, it'll be a lesson to me, long as I live, never to judge so hasty, again."



CHAPTER XIII

THE night before Thanksgiving Day a letter came for Grandma Willis from her son, telling her that he found it impossible to get home that week. The letter was sent from a town in one of the Middle Western States, which she judged to be near a mine of some sort. It was part of the tangle of her life just then that she never knew exactly where her son was at any time when he was away from home. The letters and post-cards which he sent her were invariably written as he was about to leave the place from which they were dated.

"It makes me feel as if he wasn't anywhere,

some o' the time," Grandma Willis confessed to Malcolm one day; "I can't seem to picture things out in my mind unless I know a little mite about them."

"Father never likes anybody to know where he is or what he's doing when he's away," said Malcolm. "Mother's always fussed about that, but she's given it up lately. He won't have a clerk like most men, so there'd be somebody to answer questions; when he isn't there the office is shut up."

"Well, dear, I suppose he doesn't need any help in his business; he's always been a very smart boy," said Grandma Willis, her thoughts running back to what Malcolm had said about his mother. Was it possible that Henry had been the one to blame, far back of the present, for the first wedge that widened the distance between his wife and himself?

She thought of it again as she read the letter Thanksgiving eve; it would have been the same, no doubt, had Louise been at home.

"And perhaps she'd have had a pretty new dress, and invited folks, and counted on him to help make them have a good time," thought

Grandma Willis as she creased the letter back and forth, between her fingers, and at last returned it to its envelope. "There's something wrong when business comes in between folks that way. I'm glad I wrote Louise that long letter day before yesterday. Maybe she's having her lonesome times, even if she is enjoying herself with the climate and her friends."

The crowning touch to the pleasure of Thanksgiving Day was given Grandma Willis by the delight in Nora's face when she was told that as soon as the turkey was in the oven she might depart to spend the day with her sister's family. In a big basket she carried a small squash pie made for each child by Grandma Willis, as well as an apple turnover apiece, and a round loaf of spice cake with frosting and nuts on its top.

"They'll be fair crazy when they see it," said Nora, as she hid these treasures from view under a paper cover and placed her apron above it. "They'll think 'tis my sewing I've brought along," she said gaily.

She started off before noon while Grandma Willis, in a big white apron with a bib, was

making gravy and moving half a dozen sauce pans about on the top of the stove, to be sure that each simmering vegetable had the proper amount of heat and no more. When Nora was safely out of the way Grandma Willis brought forth from the cupboard two cranberry pies; the rich crimson of their surface was crossed by a wonderful lattice-work of paste, and she surveyed them with pardonable pride.

"We can't eat but one, with all the other things," she said; "and there's no telling just when Henry'll come back. I'm going to run across the hall with one o' these pies for Mrs. Rankin. I don't believe that Swede girl who's her cook can make cranberry pies. Jimmy says she don't speak a word of English. I'm going to take this one, for I think it's the handsomest, and the boys wouldn't ever know the difference. I'd like to put it on one o' my sprigged china plates that I brought down, but they're a mite small; I'll just wrap a napkin 'round the edge o' this plate. There! that's all right."

The morning had been a tiresome one for Mrs. Rankin. From her window she had

watched the stream of passers-by, without the least wish to mingle with them, yet vaguely resenting their ability to hurry along unchecked by pain such as beset her with every step she took. She was wondering when Grandma Willis would come to let her know about the matter of the salve. She had had it tested through a young physician, in charge of an emergency station, and found it even better than she had thought at first. There was always a market for such things, properly handled, as the salve would be by her agents in many countries beside her own. She would be liberal with the old countrywoman whose face she liked, and whose eyes she trusted. It was about time to hear from the salve-maker; but after all there was no hurry. As she thought about it, sitting in her big chair with the high arched back, there came a ring at the bell.

There was a short parley at the door, then it closed and a moment later the woman bore in through the soft hangings the cranberry pie, and a little note hastily written in pencil by Grandma Willis.

"Dear Mrs. Rankin," she read, "I want you to have one of my pies to go with your Thanksgiving dinner. I hope it will taste good. I'm coming to see you pretty soon.

"Yours respectfully,

"Sarah Willis."

The woman holding the pie, regarding it with an impersonal gaze, saw her mistress smile.

"Let me see — I told you to make the cook understand I wished nothing in the way of dessert," said Mrs. Rankin; "the sweet stuff she makes I cannot endure. But I don't wish to injure her feelings, as they seem very brittle and her temper is high; I'll take this cranberry pie in here after dinner with my coffee; I'm sure that will be sufficiently unusual for a holiday. Did you thank Mrs. Willis for me?"

"As well as I could before she ran off," said the woman briefly. "She's the quickest stepping person for her age I ever saw."

It was a disappointment to Grandma Willis that there were no other neighbors on whom

she might bestow the fruits of her labors in the kitchen. Everyone in The Welford save Mrs. Rankin had gone away for the day. The house seemed lonesomely quiet to her without a sound from above or below. She had learned to listen for the lusty cry of the Sweetser baby when he wakened from his nap or thought his meals were too long delayed. Her ears were sharp and she smiled to herself when she heard him; but to-day he had been carried, rosy charms, cries and all, to the house of an adoring cousin. Everybody had stopped to say good-bye to Grandma Willis, and she had wished each one a good time.

Now, standing in the middle of the kitchen floor, she looked about her wistfully.

"Everything's done far as it can be," she said; "the table's set, every bit o' the furniture's dusted; I shouldn't be ashamed to have Lester come right out into the kitchen if he wants to. Now what next?"

There seemed to be no next, except folding her hands, to wait Malcolm's return from church with his guest. He had brought Lester Barnard to see his grandmother a few days be-

fore, and she had taken a great liking to the tall, thin, shy boy who thanked her so heartily for her kindness.

"Why, it's kind of you to come," she had assured him, "to keep Malcolm and me company. Two aren't quite enough for a real Thanksgiving dinner."

There had been an early morning service at the church in which Malcolm sang, and to that Grandma Willis, who kept Burford hours, had gone. She slipped into the Sweetser's pew and sat there, not fully understanding all that was said and done, but joining in the hymns, listening to the prayers, and resting in the peace and stillness of the beautiful church.

"I don't know what our minister would say about the way I'm doing," she thought, as she sat in the kitchen rocker, while from the stove came the steady, gentle bubbling and simmering which told that all was going on well. "But the church he'd expect I'd go to, like ours, is so far off, and I don't know anybody who goes there, and Henry says it's a big congregation and no free pews. He used to hire one, but there was nobody to fill it. Seems too

bad he's never home Sundays. And this last month he planned to be here most of the time, and I don't feel as if I'd seen him, hardly."

She stopped rocking for a moment as the sound of chimes came to her, from the belfry near by.

"My, but that's pretty!" she said, and opened the window so that she might hear still better. She began to hum the tune the bells were playing, and kept on when they had stopped.

"Bells like that would sound beautiful up in Burford," she said, as she closed the window to shut out the frosty air. "If anybody had money, lots of it, that would be a nice way to spend some. It's so still up there, the folks could hear them way off on the distant farms. I wonder how much they cost, such bells. I suppose maybe two — three hundred dollars. Well, 'tisn't likely anybody —"

Grandma Willis stopped short; she had forgotten all about the possibility of her having extra money to spend. The amount was vague, to be sure, for Judge Holcomb had mentioned no sum; he had only told her she must ask Mrs.

Rankin to make an offer in round terms, and then tell her she would take a little time to consider it. But Grandma Willis had expectations so modest that they would have surprised even the judge who fancied he had gauged her ignorance of money matters.

"If she offered me a couple o' hundred dollars to sell outright," and Grandma Willis breathed faster at the realization of her mounting hope, "if she should go as high as that, maybe she'd give me half in money and the other half interest in the business. 'Twould be a risk for her, of course. She'd have to sell a lot o' the salve before she'd get back what she'd put out! Maybe she'll decide not to, so long as I want to keep a share in it. But if she *did* — after I'd helped Flora with her art lessons, I believe I'd find out about those bells! 'Twouldn't make any difference if I didn't hear them long: there are young folks growing up all the time; little Marg'ret Coburn and others; they'd love the bells. There's Malcolm this minute!"

From that time, for the rest of the day, and well into the evening, Grandma Willis had no

chance to think of salve or chimes or art-students.

"I want my grandma to have the time of her life," Malcolm had confided to Lester, and if his wish failed to come true, there was no evidence of it.

"When dinner's ready, Lester and I want to help carry it in, grandma," Malcolm had informed her, sticking his head in at the kitchen door. "We want to carry in the turkey, specially, one on each side of the platter, and bear it high, the way they do with the boar's head in pictures of English Christmas dinners. And we'd like to have everything on the table at once, if you're willing, so we shall know just what is expected of us."

"Well, dear, you shall," laughed Grandma Willis, "but you go amuse your company for awhile; dinner isn't quite ready."

When it had reached the height of perfection, when the potatoes were golden brown and the turkey was no longer to be resisted, she summoned her aides. They came, Malcolm with a package in his hand, and Lester with a purple box.

"We want you to put on this apron and cap, so you'll look exactly like the Chocolate Girl, grandma," said Malcolm, unrolling his bundle.

"And will you please pin on these violets," said Lester, presenting a great fragrant bunch with a low bow when the apron and cap had been donned.

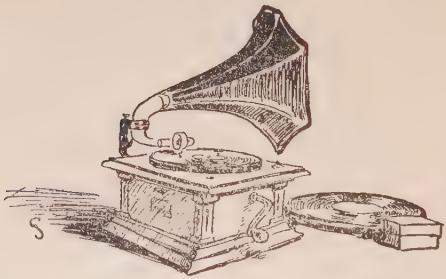
"Why, you dear boys!" said Grandma Willis. "There, I'll have to kiss you both before I do another thing," and she carried out her words without a moment's delay. "Now you take hold of that platter real careful, and don't tip it a mite, will you?"

Nothing went amiss at that dinner, from the food, to the toasts which were drunk in cold water until the very last one; that toast was given by Grandma Willis first, as she raised to her lips her glass of cider, just poured by Malcolm.

"I'd like to have one toast for some folks you haven't either of you ever seen," she said; "I'd like to say, 'Here's to Burford folks!'"

"Hold on a minute, grandma," cried Mal-

colm. "I want to add something. I say, 'Here's to Burford folks! May the rest of them be half as good as the one we know!' Ready, Lester?"



CHAPTER XIV

IT was after ten o'clock that night when Dorothy came home. Her cheeks, which usually had only the faintest tinge of pink, were flushed a deep crimson and her eyes were unnaturally bright.

"Did you have a good time?" she asked listlessly, as Grandma Willis put her arm around her. The child laid her head on her grandmother's shoulder, and moved it up and down in a restless way.

"I had a beautiful day, dearie," said Grandma Willis softly, "a beautiful day. Malcolm and Lester helped me about everything, and

praised my cooking till I was vain as a peacock; and they took me to walk in the Park, some paths I've never been; and then when we came back, we played games, and told stories, and what do you think? Lester had his phonograph sent over here, and to finish up, it played and sang for us for an hour, a regular concert programme, with famous piano players and singers I've read about. Lester's only been gone a little while. I told him he ought to sleep well, a boy that had given as much pleasure as he had to an old body from the country. And Malcolm, too; he's been the best boy that ever was. Why, dearie, your hands are hot! Don't you feel right? Didn't you have a good time?"

"Yes," said the child wearily, "pretty good; but I'm tired, grandmother, and my head aches. I wanted to come home before, but I had to wait for some of the others; they'd invited ever so many for the evening; and they had some actors and actresses to give a play. I got so tired before it was over!"

"You come to bed now, dearie," said Grandma Willis; "that's the best place for a little

girl that feels the way you do; and grandma'll bathe your head and get you cooled off so you'll go to sleep."

Dorothy submitted instantly; her elfishness had gone, and she was glad to be taken care of. But in spite of all Grandma Willis did, the little hands grew hotter instead of cooler, and Dorothy's cheeks flamed to scarlet. When at last she fell asleep, she tossed and turned in her bed, and her grandmother, sitting beside her, was greatly troubled.

"Acts to me something like the measles, only not coming out well," she murmured. "I believe I'll step to the kitchen and ask Nora if Dorothy's ever had a spell like this before. I hear her out there; she's just come home from her visit."

Stepping softly, she went to Nora.

"I had the grandest time that ever I had," began Nora, and then broke off abruptly. "What's gone wrong wid you, ma'am?" she asked.

"It's Dorothy," said Grandma Willis; "she came home from her party all tired out, and it looks to me as if she's going to be sick. She's

feverish and tossing round. Has she had measles, Nora?"

"Not since I lived in the family, an' that's five years," said Nora. "Master Malcolm had them three years ago, but she was sent off to a friend's. Maybe 'tis something she's eaten; she's a terrible eater of sweet stuff. She'll likely be all right in the morning."

But in the morning Dorothy was far from all right, and the doctor was summoned by Malcolm, who had gone to bed the minute Lester departed and slept through all the troubles of the night. When the doctor appeared he made a rapid diagnosis of the case.

"Measles, with some complications," he said crisply, and then turned to Grandma Willis. "You look like a woman of too much sense to have let the child stuff herself till she got in this state," he said with severity. "Her mother is always very careful about Dorothy's diet. I have told her she must be; the child is delicately organized. How did this happen?"

With cheeks that burned as hotly as Dorothy's, Grandma Willis heard his words of reproof, but before she could speak, champion-

ship came from the last quarter from which she would ever have expected it. Dorothy raised herself on her pillows, her eyes bright with fever fastened on the doctor, one little shaking finger pointed at him.

"Don't you talk to my grandmother like that," she cried. "She's been very particular about my food! It's other people that have given me cake and candy, cake and candy, cake and candy! And I've bought it myself, too, lots of it. I love it; I'd like to eat it all the time, every minute. My grandmother had nothing to do with it," and Dorothy's head fell back on her pillow, while her eyes still challenged the doctor from under lowered lids.

"I beg your pardon," he said to Grandma Willis, "I see your face doesn't tell a misleading story, after all. May I have a few minutes' talk with you?"

She led the way to the parlor, and then faced the doctor.

"There wasn't any way you could know I hadn't done it," she said with gentle dignity, "you needn't mind about that. Will you tell me just what to do for Dorothy? I'm used to

nursing, up country, where I live. I can follow directions."

"Good," said the doctor, "I'd rather have you than a dozen ordinary nurses; but you'll get tired, and you'll have to keep away from people outside for awhile; can you stand that?"

Grandma Willis laughed up at him.

"I don't know many folks," she said, "and those I do know won't miss me, I guess, not for awhile at any rate. I'll send a little note up to Mrs. Sweetser, so she won't come down; I wouldn't have her baby catch the measles for anything."

"That's right," said the doctor, "I see you can be trusted. Now for directions in regard to your patient."

The next three weeks might well have seemed a trial to Grandma Willis. She shut herself off from communication with everyone save Dorothy and Nora. Malcolm, to be sure, talked with her occasionally through the crack of the door, telling her of his daily doings, and saying how much he missed her, but that was the most his grandmother would allow, in spite

of his insistence that having had the measles once, he was immune.

"Folks have them more than once, sometimes," said Grandma Willis firmly. "You be a good boy, Malcolm, and shut that door."

Nora dispatched a letter to her sister, congratulating herself on her Thanksgiving festival.

"I've told her to keep them children away from here," she announced to Grandma Willis, "so now I've no fears."

Dorothy was far from being an ideal little invalid; she was fractious all the time, and worse than that often; she evaded obeying the doctor's orders whenever she could, and only unrelaxing vigilance on her grandmother's part was responsible for her gradual improvement. She eyed most attempts to entertain her with cool indifference, but the errands she devised for the patient old feet were numberless. Nora was seething with indignation which hissed out in words now and then, but Grandma Willis only smiled, and trotted all day long.

"That child ain't made o' flesh an' blood, Master Malcolm," stormed Nora. "It's never

a sweet word or a 'thank you' she's given your grandmother this three weeks day after to-morrer! And your father not home once to see to it. There's queer doings in this house. And your mother off dancin' an' palaverin' with her gay friends!"

"Mother doesn't know Dorothy's ill, Nora," said Malcolm, "for when the doctor said there was no danger, grandma said we wouldn't bother her. And father didn't know till a few days ago, and he's coming home to-morrow or next day."

"I'm glad o' that," muttered Nora; "an' I'm hopin' he'll be fitter to speak a pleasant word than when last he was here," she added to herself.

The quarantine was over, but Dorothy was still in bed and under the doctor's care when her father arrived. To the delight of Grandma Willis he was more cheerful than when he left home a month before.

"Haven't heard anything from my friend Leeds since I went away," he said as he left the dining-room with his little mother tucked under his arm after a late breakfast. "I didn't know

but he'd be here to greet me. I guess, though, I've fixed him now," and he looked down at Grandma Willis, and laughed. "Left, right, left — keep step with me, mother, to the invalid's room. Then you put on your things and run out to the Park for awhile; everything's sparkling like Fairyland this morning."

"Who sends you all these floral tributes?" he asked Dorothy a few minutes later, walking about her room, hands deep in his pockets. "Roses, cyclamens, pinks; quite a show."

"They aren't mine," said Dorothy, looking at him shrewdly, "they're grandmother's."

"Grandmother's!" echoed her father. "Who in the world —"

"The cards are in that basket," said Dorothy; "she leaves them there, so I can look at them, for fun; we spell things from the names. It's a game grandmother invented specially for me; it's a pretty good one, when I'm not too tired."

Her father looked at her quizzically as he took up the basket, but he spoke with firmness of purpose back of his words.

"It's your grandmother that's in danger of

getting too tired, not you," he said, "and as soon as you're a bit stronger I'm going to pack you off to your mother. I'll send a nurse with you, and then she can come back. Hello; what's this — 'For the dear little Burford Rose with love from Caroline Raymond?' How long has this been going on?"

"Ever since the day of the dancing-party," said Dorothy. "Mrs. Sweetser introduced everybody to grandmother, and Mrs. Raymond fell in love with her, she said, and I'm sure that's the way she has acted. She has sent flowers or something every single day, and yesterday she just *insisted* on grandmother's going for a ride with her in their automobile, the newest one. And grandmother has had flowers and letters from other people too; and they've invited her and invited her; but she couldn't leave me, of course, till the last day or two; and I can't spare her very often now. Where do you think she is, father? I want my pillows shaken up and my head rubbed."

"I'll shake up your pillows, and I'll rub your head," said her father; "your grandmother is in the Park by my orders."

"Your fingers aren't as soft as grandmother's," complained Dorothy. "I'd rather have her."

"You'll have me, or nothing," said Henry Willis. "What a little bundle of selfishness you are, Dorothy! Come, turn your head around so I can get at it."

But the child buried her face in the pillows, and when Grandma Willis came in a few minutes later, Dorothy flung her arms around her grandmother's neck with a wail of mingled pain and indignation.

"He says I'm a bundle of selfishness just because I want you to take care of me, grandmother," she sobbed. "Am I? His fingers are hard, and yours are soft as they can be!"

"Well, there, Henry, I should have supposed you'd know better — a sick little girl like Dorothy," said Grandma Willis reproachfully to her son. "You wait till I get these thick gloves off, dearie, and I'll 'tend to your poor little head. Henry, you go away, now; play us one of your tunes on the piano, or something."

"She's gone to sleep," said Grandma Willis when she stole into the parlor half an hour

later. "Now you tell me the news about yourself, Henry, where you've been and all. You've sent me a lot of pretty post-cards. I've kept every one of them."

"There's nothing to tell," he said, twirling on the piano stool; "it's the same old story; looking after all sorts of things in uninteresting places; making people invest their money whether they want to or not; or no, making them think they want to do it. That's my work. I've done a good stunt now, and I can lie off for the next month if I feel like it. I'm going to see that you get some rest and some fun. You're looking tired."

"Maybe I'm a little bit tired," Grandma Willis admitted, "but I've been getting acquainted with Dorothy, and that's worth a great deal to me."

"Is it?" her son looked at her curiously.

"Why, yes," said Grandma Willis; "of course she's been a mite fussy, same as sick little folks always are — and most big folks, too — but she's grown to depend on me; that's what pleases me."

"She depends on you all right," said Henry

Willis. "The minute the doctor says she can travel, I'm going to send her down to her mother; let her depend on Louise for awhile, it'll be an object lesson for both of them."

Grandma Willis looked at him, hesitating.

"I've been thinking about your business," she said slowly, "and how much it takes you away from home. Of course Louise must be proud to have you get on so well; Lester Barnard was telling me Thanksgiving Day that his guardian said there wasn't a man knew more about mines and such things than you; he said whatever you touched seemed to turn to money for folks, and I know you must make a great deal to live as you do; but it leaves Louise alone more than a woman that's fond of her husband likes, Henry."

Her son gave a short laugh.

"Don't worry about that," he said, "she's never alone except when she wishes to be; she has plenty of friends."

"I know how I felt it once when your father was called to the legislature," said Grandma Willis, with gentle persistence, "but I wouldn't say anything about it, because 'twas a good

opportunity for him to go out into the world and see things; and he never knew till after 'twas all over and done with, how I felt; but if he'd kept on going away, why, I might have grown kind of indifferent on the outside, from keeping my feelings to myself so. I don't know how it might have been."

The hard eyes of the man softened a little as he looked at her.

"There are things that I forget anybody in the world still believes in, till I hear you talk, mother," he said. "I wish father could have lived; I'd like to have seen you together, now."

"I wish he could have lived to see you in your home," said Grandma Willis softly; "don't you remember how he used to laugh and say, 'Henry'll be a rich man, some day, and if a man can keep honest as my boy is, and get rich, it's all right.' He used to say it when you'd seem to know just where to find the best blueberries, so they'd bring the highest price, and when you sent that great box o' mountain laurel to the city. Remember how pleased he was?"

Her son nodded silently. The fingers of his

right hand, stretched behind him, pressed the keys down, one after another, in quick, noiseless succession.

"'Bijah never made much money himself," the sweet old voice went on, "but he did love to see other folks prosper. And I've often thought what he gave you was a better start for a boy going off from home, than money — his sense o' justice and honesty, and his way of making folks like him and trust him — you inherited those. I can see him now holding out his hand to you when we'd meet you at the depot, down to the Centre, and how he'd look right straight into your eyes from under that old felt hat, and you'd look back at him, and then he'd let go of your hand and rest his on your shoulder a minute, and say, 'all right, boy!' and then you'd come to me where I sat in the old wagon holding the horse, and watching you. Two weeks every summer you used to be with us those first years when you were in that railroad office. I wish your father could step in here to-night."

The man's eyes darkened as he swung around with his back to her.

"He might not like the city, or get on as well as you do," he said after a moment's silence. "You seem to have made a good many friends, mother, and valuable ones." He swung around to face her again. "You're a great success, I understand from Dorothy. She tells me all these flowers and potted plants are from your admirers."

Grandma Willis laughed and shook her head.

"She's a little tease, same as you used to be," she said. "Folks have been real kind because I'm a stranger, and they saw how I was situated, kind of alone here, and they knew I'd like flowers, of course, being from the country. You see that little pot o' daisies? Well, I think everything of that. It came from Nellie Keen, that's clerk in the toy-shop where I've been two — three times. I made her a little pie and a round cake for her Thanksgiving, and she asked me where I lived, and a few days ago she came bringing this and left it with Jimmy for me, saying she was afraid I was sick, for she'd missed seeing me. Wasn't that real sweet of her?

"But there's one thing I didn't care much

for, Henry," said Grandma Willis when her son had inspected the pot of daisies. "That Mr. Leeds came here the other night; I hated to tell you at first, seeing you were so glad you'd had no letter from him. When Nora told him you were away he asked for me, and when she explained why I couldn't see him, on account of Dorothy, he said, 'Tell the old lady not to let her son catch the measles,' and went off. Next day he sent me a bunch o' red roses, but the stems were all wired, and they faded right down before night. I was sorry for them, to have been spoiled that way, poor things; but I don't like that man's way of speaking, Henry, though he may have one o' the best hearts in the world."

"He hasn't," said Henry Willis, leaving the piano stool, and beginning to pace the room. "He has one of the worst, if I'm any judge."

"Then he isn't really a friend of yours — he never was?" asked Grandma Willis.

"He isn't, and he never was," said her son; "and yet —" he took two turns around the room before he finished his sentence — "some night, the next time he's in town, I've got to —

I'd like to ask him here to dinner. It won't be till after Christmas, mother. Can you stand him, just for one evening?"

Grandma Willis looked at him with the love that nothing could ever quench, shining in her eyes, through all her bewilderment.

"I could stand a great deal more than that, to help my boy," she said quietly. "You let me know beforehand, so Nora and I can have a real good dinner for him."

CHAPTER XV

"IT'S going to be a white Christmas," said Grandma Willis. "I'm glad of that. It must be pretty, up home, to-day; but I'd have to choose my steps, real careful, up the lane to Molly Sanderson's; I'd have to avoid that spot near the birches where the land hollows out; that's where I'm always getting in over my rubbers, when deep weather begins."

She let the little pincushion cover in which she was setting the last loving stitches for a Burford neighbor, slip from her hands to her lap. She sat looking out of the window, a half-smile on her face. It was not the wide

avenue, the Park, or the shifting panorama of the passers-by she saw; Burford with its crusted fields and snow-laden trees, its buried fences and ice-bound brooks filled her vision. Her door was ajar, and suddenly she caught the words of Dorothy's visitor, the little girl who had laughed at the Burford gown.

"Your grandmother hasn't changed her dress a bit, with all the chance she's had to see city styles," said the child with a giggle. "She looked so funny when she let me in!"

Grandma Willis rose quickly, to shut her door, her spools and scissors falling from her lap; one spool rolled out into the hall and she had to step over the threshold to pick it up.

"My grandmother," she heard Dorothy say in a tone of proud ownership, and she could imagine the airy set of the little head; "my grandmother is a *lady;* and she can wear just exactly whatever she thinks best. In Burford, where her house is, she is a *very* important person; and everyone who has met her here has been *very* much impressed with her. She is going with Mrs. Raymond to do the last of her Christmas shopping to-morrow morning."

"Oh," said the little visitor, in a subdued voice. "I didn't know she was like that. You must be sorry you're going off to-morrow."

Grandma Willis had shut the door softly before Dorothy finished her remarks; she lost the part about Mrs. Raymond, but she had heard enough.

"She's standing up for me," said Grandma Willis to herself; "and 'tisn't the first time; she has the makings of a sweet little woman in her if she could see real things, instead of shams all the time. I wish I could have her up in Burford next summer, in a gingham apron an' a sunbonnet; teach her about the growing things and the birds; but there, I don't s'pose she'd want to come."

When Dorothy started off the next morning, she put her arms around her grandmother's neck and whispered in her ear.

"I wish you were going," she said; "nobody else is as nice as you are, grandmother. I thank you very, *very* much."

"Well, there," said Grandma Willis as she turned away from the window after seeing the

carriage roll off, "to have that child feel as she does, why, it's worth everything! What she said, coming from her, was 'most as much as the things little Margaret Coburn says, are, coming from her. Children are different, same as grown folks; I don't know but they're more different, for we get some things tried out of us as we grow older and get knocked against, and kind of worked into a general shape. I'd like to see those two children together; there'd be some doings, I guess!"

In the few days that were left her before Christmas, Grandma Willis did a great deal of shopping; there were so many people in Burford who, at the last minute, had decided that gifts from the city were what they desired for their relatives and friends, that a big box had to be packed and sent to the care of Mrs. Coburn, the mother of little Margaret. It must reach Burford by Christmas Eve at the latest.

"It's so fortunate my own work is all done," said Grandma Willis as she displayed a long list of requests to Mrs. Raymond, who had enjoyed her first shopping so much that she had insisted on a second trip. "And there's an-

other thing; I'd like to send them up some pretty spangles to hang on the tree for the Sunday School children and their fathers and mothers — that takes in 'most everybody in town.

"I thought if we went to the toy-shop where Nellie Keen works, I could find something. I've got a dollar I can spend that way, and the package could be slipped right into the box and directed to the minister's wife, Mrs. Briggs, with a note inside."

To the toy-shop they went, and Nellie Keen made the dollar accomplish results far beyond the most extravagant hopes of her country customer. A few words spoken to her by Mrs. Raymond while Grandma Willis was lost in admiration of some little tree angels, undoubtedly helped to work the marvel. At first Grandma Willis had asked the price of the boxes of colored tinsel and the shining balls, but after one or two questions, Mrs. Raymond made a suggestion in her quick, authoritative way which was yet good-natured.

"Nellie knows what will make the tree prettiest," she said to Grandmother Willis; "why

not give her your dollar and let her choose the trimmings?"

"Why, maybe that would be best," agreed the old lady, and she opened her pocket-book and gave Nellie the money at once, watching her with growing wonder as she packed a big pasteboard box full of smaller boxes in which were all sorts of glittering, sparkling, shimmering things, tiny candles in many colored tin sockets, and last of all two little figures, a snow-sprinkled Santa Claus, and a blue-robed angel with silvery wings half unfolded.

"They won't know what to make of it!" breathed Grandma Willis delightedly as Nellie began to fold soft tissue paper about the little figures, and crush it between the small boxes, wherever a space was left. "They won't know what to say! I'd like to be there to see them when 'tis opened."

"I wish you could see what's in there, in that pasteboard box," she said to Larry and Jim the next day as they were nailing on the cover of the wooden box Jim had persuaded the janitor to give him. "If ever you want to make money go a long way, boys, you step

down to Krause's toy-shop, and ask for Nellie Keen and tell her I sent you. I said to Mrs. Raymond that I wished everybody could know about that place; but she said she thought likely this was a particularly good year for me to get such things. I s'pose tinsels and those sparkling balls vary in price, same as flour and bacon."

When the cover had been tightly nailed down, and the address put on in black paint by the boys, Grandma Willis, refusing the elevator, walked slowly up the stairs, hesitated for a moment in the hall, then touched the electric button at Mrs. Rankin's door, and heard the bell give its sharp ring.

When she was ushered into the little reception-room Mrs. Rankin was already seated in the big chair; she did not rise, but held out her hand to her guest.

"I am glad to see you," she said brusquely; "I am going away to-morrow for two or three weeks, and I hoped we might settle that little matter of the salve before I go."

"I've come to speak about it," said Grandma Willis. "When I went away from here

that day I felt as if I couldn't bear to let it go out of my hands, not even to help the folks far off that need it. I thought of the little boxes 'Bijah made, waiting to be filled some day, in my stair cupboard — and it hurt me here," she put her hand over her heart, "so I couldn't seem to think clear and straight as I needed to. I went out into the Park and there I met a man who'd been kind to me once before, and he's the sort you can tell things to, and know he'll give you his best judgment. I told him all about it, and he suggested a way out, so I could help folks here and there same as before, and still do as you'd like to have me. He wrote out a proposition for me to make to you. He's a man that's had considerable experience."

"What was his proposition?" asked Mrs. Rankin, and there was no doubt about the interest in her voice.

"I've got it right here in my pocket-book," said Grandma Willis. "I've thought about it a good deal while my little granddaughter was sick, and it seems 'most too good to be true; but he thought 'twas fair. I've a good mind

to turn the paper right over to you, so you can read it for yourself; maybe my voice would make it seem different, being so eager. His writing is clear as day."

She handed the sheet of paper to Mrs. Rankin, who shot a keen glance at her as her eyes fell on the close, black lines which filled the page, but Grandma Willis was looking at a picture which hung low on the wall opposite her, a smile curving her lips. It was a winter scene, the dusk of a short day in the real country; a pale cold glow pulsed up from the horizon; a delicate crescent moon hung, gleaming faintly through the gathering gray, over a quiet field where one little frozen bush still showed its head above the snow. Grandma Willis nodded to herself.

"I know just such a spot," she murmured; "down toward the Townsend's meadow. It'll be dark there pretty soon."

She watched the picture, half expecting to see the darkness gather and shut it from her view. For the moment she forgot where she was, for what she had come — everything save the field that spoke of home. With a start she

remembered, and turned to find Mrs. Rankin regarding her fixedly.

"You chose a skilled counsellor in Judge Holcomb," said the woman in the deep chair. "I have encountered evidences of his mental acuteness before to-day."

Grandma Willis leaned forward eagerly.

"I didn't really choose him," she said, "but I was tangled in my mind, same as you will be sometimes, and I met him, and all at once I felt he was the one to help me. Didn't you ever know such a time?"

The woman before her waited for a moment. In that moment she saw herself, a young, inexperienced girl whose father's invention, his only legacy to her, was to be sold to the highest bidder. She saw the man twice her age who had saved her from sacrificing it, who had married her, made her independent of him, and dying, left her holder of many patents, with knowledge and caution to keep them all and make them yield the highest possible profit.

"Yes," she said as if the words were drawn from her against her will. "Yes, I have known such a time," and again she paused.

"Why not have a sort of partnership with the little old countrywoman?" she questioned herself. "Why not yield at once?"

But habit was too strong for her, and more than that she knew, with sudden conviction, that she had meant to be very generous; the judge had put philanthropy out of her power, and she was not accustomed to interference. She felt disposed to blame him.

"I will think the matter over," she said at last, returning the paper to Grandma Willis. "On the whole I think the decision may wait until I return from my visit. Then I will let you know at once. Can you bear the extra delay?"

She looked up at her visitor, who had risen, with a half-smile which made her strong face more agreeable than it had been before. Grandma Willis put her hand in the one outstretched to her and with the other hand she drew from her pocket a little package.

"I'm used to waiting for things," she said, "and this is 'most too wonderful to be anything but a dream. I've been real bold, Mrs. Rankin. Knowing how much you travel, I've

made you one o' my ribbon needle-books, for a Christmas remembrance. Folks do seem to like them, and the pattern of this ribbon made me think of this room o' yours. 'Tisn't anything to thank me for. I hope you'll have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and many of them. Good-bye," and she was gone, leaving in Mrs. Rankin's lap the little tissue paper package tied with red and green ribbon with a red-cross seal and a head of Santa Claus on one side, and a "Please do not open till Christmas," in gilt on the other.

"Put that in the tray of my trunk," said Mrs. Rankin to the maid who answered her summons, "close to the top, and remember where you put it. I shall wish it early Christmas morning."

On Christmas Eve Malcolm took his grandmother to church to hear the carols sung.

"I want to sit in the back pew, way out of sight," she told him when he left her at the door, to join the choristers. "I'll wait right here when 'tis over."

She tucked herself into the corner of the pew, and listened to the voices singing the

sweet old carols and some that were new to her, while her thoughts flew back over the years to bygone Yuletides when she and 'Bijah had sung together in the choir. After the service was over she went out into the clear, frosty night, and found not only Malcolm, but his father, waiting for her.

With her two guardians she threaded the maze of streets, to the markets, where she saw the Christmas pigs tricked out in ribbon bravery, and laughed to the delight of passers-by. She helped a girlish buyer choose her turkey, displaying such knowledge of the proportions and qualities to be desired in the bird, that the young housewife was convinced she had fallen into wise company.

"My husband's a doctor, serving in one of the hospitals," she explained to Grandma Willis, "and he's to have all day to-morrow free. I shall tell him about you; he's country-born and he'll know just what kind of a turkey he's eating."

"You be sure and stuff it full enough, won't you?" said Grandma Willis. "There's nothing looks much more discouraged than a loose-

stuffed turkey. But there! I know you'll do it all right. That cook-book you tell me you go by is one o' the best. I hope you'll have a perfect time together, and I don't feel any doubts. Good-bye."

Henry Willis and his boy watched her with indulgent eyes; Malcolm indeed drew her arm closer through his after each adventure in helpfulness, and looked at her with a protecting air as if she were a little girl to be loved and guarded.

"You've had a nice time, haven't you, grandma?" he asked when at last they were at home again.

"Beautiful," said Grandma Willis. "I hope you two boys aren't all tired out. I shall dream o' those torches flaring out over the carts, and the peanut stands, and all. I hope that man 't was buying him a vest out o' that cart took the pepper'n salt one; 'twas the best of the lot, and I told his wife so when I saw she inclined to it. I'd like to see the homes all those folks live in. And the fakirs; they were 'most sold out. I'm glad of that. There was one 't' has a wife and a new baby, he told me. He

had dancing bears, and he'd sold all but three of them when we were there. He'd had a great trade; better than usual."

"Did you ever know anybody like grandma?" Malcolm asked his father when they were alone for a moment. "She's so interested in everybody, and she thinks they're all nice — and they *are* nice, to her; except—" said Malcolm with sudden recollection, "there's just one person she doesn't like very much. You know who I mean."

"I know," said his father, his face darkening; "she's all right there, too; it's time to turn in now. Good-night."

Christmas Day was a whirl of unexpected delights, beginning with a great box of trailing greens from the South, going on through the packages from Burford, the gifts from everybody in The Welford, down to Jim and Larry, who sent a box of peppermints, "with a Merry Christmas and respects to Mrs. Willis." Even the Sweetser baby was represented by a pretty calendar. Mrs. Raymond sent superb roses, and the others of her "dancing friends," as Henry Willis called the acquaintances she had

made at Dorothy's party, all remembered her in some way. Nora had baked a wonderful cake in which candles were set and lighted for the dinner, and had furthermore made a "rale English" plum pudding which she bore in, burning merrily.

In the evening, again with her two guardians, Grandma Willis went to see a Christmas pantomime. Seated in a box, with the handsome fur coat, which was her son's gift, thrown over the back of her chair, a little sparkling pin from Malcolm fastening the lace at her neck, and a handkerchief from Nellie Keen in her lap, she made a picture well worth seeing. As she leaned forward to watch the players, her lips parted, her cheeks glowing, and her brown eyes shining under her silver hair, more than one opera glass was turned from the stage to be levelled at her; and one of the players, a tiny maiden to whom many flowers were thrown, danced close to the box when the pantomime was almost over, and with sure aim sent a rose flying straight into the black silk lap to land on Nellie Keen's gift.

"That was the cap-sheaf of my beautiful

day," wrote Grandma Willis to Mrs. Sanderson the next morning. "I put that rose in water to last long as it will, but when it goes, I shall put it in an envelope and keep it with —," (here a word was erased, and rewritten), "a special little parcel that I've got. I kept thinking how 'Bijah would have liked to see that little thing in her fluffy pink-spangled dress.

"He loved pretty dancing, always! But some way I guess he knew I was there, enjoying it all. You needn't read that to the Briggs's unless you think best — but yet you may if you want to. It's what I believe."

There was one more thing in the drawer with her special treasures — a small envelope which contained a card; on the card was written in the nervous hand of her daughter-in-law a message, short, but warming to her heart. It had come with the box of trailing greens. Grandma Willis took it from the envelope and looked at it once again, when she had sealed her Burford letter.

"'Merry Christmas to Mother Willis — with many thanks — from Louise,'" she read.

"Isn't that good? When folks get where they feel like saying 'mother,' love isn't far off; it's pretty near!"

CHAPTER XVI

FOR a week after Christmas the world of the city was full of new wonders for the old lady; she trotted joyfully over the pavements or in the beautiful Park, with one or another of her competent guides. It was holiday time for Malcolm, and he took his grandmother on several short excursions, on one of which they were joined by Lester Barnard. The boys hired a hansom cab, and seated with their guest between them they took a long drive up the wide Avenue and out to the very edge of the country.

"I don't enjoy riding in a closed up carriage, not really," Grandma Willis confided to the boys, "and automobiles go 'most too fast for me, but this seems like a kind of a game, same as I used to have when I was a little girl, and my only brother (who died when he was fifteen), would play he was horse, and hitch the reins way up over my head so I couldn't reach them. I'd put my chair in under them, and sit holding my little blue silk parasol with a white handle and a pinked edge over my head, and pretend I was driving him. I like this way o' travelling."

She liked everything; all that was done for her, all the things she was taken to see and hear; pictures and music and a pretty play, all charmed her. When, on New Year's Day, Judge Holcomb called in the afternoon, and presented her with an old-fashioned bouquet, it seemed to give the last touch to her happy week.

"Tea-rosebud in the centre, forget-me-nots and little green sprigs round it, and lace paper outside," she said as she held the bouquet and twirled it around to make it send out whiffs of

delicate fragrance. "And there never was anything sweeter than sweet geranium! It's a real old-time nosegay, such as I haven't seen since way back when I was a girl. I didn't suppose anybody made them nowadays — specially in the city. Do you know where the one that made it was born?"

"It may have been up near Burford," said the Judge, smiling down at her delight; "he has a good country color in his face."

He was still smiling at her and listening to her when Henry Willis came home, and he held out his hand with a "Happy New Year."

"You're taking good care of my friend, I see," he said with a touch of cordiality in his manner; "she looks well and happy."

"She'd always be well and happy if I had my way," said Henry Willis. "Don't you suppose I know I have the best mother in the world?"

"I'm inclined to think you do know it," said the Judge. "Bring your mother down to the Court House some day, Mr. Willis. It might amuse her to look around."

"Thank you," said Grandma Willis, "you're

real kind. I'd like to go some day when my son has time."

"I'm glad he's made up his mind to be civil," said Henry Willis, when the judge had gone. "I suppose he's decided I'm not so black as I was painted, after all, seeing I have you for a mother."

"What was the trouble, dear?" asked Grandma Willis; "is it anything I could understand?"

"No, I'm afraid you couldn't —" her son looked at her uneasily. "You see, with you, mother, things are right, or else they're wrong; you've never considered the rather drab-colored means that have to be employed sometimes to reach a desired end."

"You mean a good end?" queried his mother, her clear eyes holding his.

"Well, yes, good in the world's way," he said half-defiantly; "successful — that's good."

Grandma Willis gazed at him and waited.

"You make it hard for me," said the man, "your way of looking at things isn't the one accepted in most of the transactions in which I've had a part. The judge has a cousin who

was living out in a little western town a few years ago. She'd had rather a hard time, for her husband was a rolling stone; the kind of man who wouldn't make good anywhere. A company in whose interests I was working wanted the land owned by this chap, and I persuaded him to go to another place, holding out certain inducements. He sold his land and moved. His wife had made friends in the little town and was interested in the church, I believe — and the man hasn't done well in his new home. That's the whole thing in a nutshell. The judge has always blamed me because I influenced that whiffiecock to sell out."

Grandma Willis pondered.

"What made the company want his land?" she asked slowly.

It was the question her son had dreaded, hoping against hope that she would not ask it. A dull red flush mounted to his forehead.

"I didn't inquire too closely into that at the time," he said. "They were buying a lot of land, and exchanging properties. I was well paid for the deal. Since then," the words seemed drawn from him against his will, "since

then it has proved that there's ore on that particular lot of land; one vein of a mine runs through it."

He wiped his forehead nervously. The clear eyes in the sweet puzzled old face had never once left his.

"Did that Mr. Leeds have anything to do with the mine, Henry?" she asked.

"Yes, he was one of the directors; he still is, for that matter," admitted her son.

"But you aren't a director, I know that without your telling me, boy," said Grandma Willis proudly. "Maybe you've been trying to get those mining people to give that poor man and his wife a share in the profits. That's what your father did, I remember when it turned out there were so many garnets in the Ledge Hill that poor old Ben Damon sold to 'Squire Rogers. He persuaded the 'squire to pay Ben a good sum, soon as that geologist found out about the garnets and told. But I'm afraid you couldn't make much headway if the other directors are like Mr. Leeds. I don't trust him, Henry. I wouldn't have any more to do with him than I could help, dear."

She laid her hand on her son's arm. The beads of perspiration stood on his forehead again. In his eyes was the look of a man who stands between two fires, and sees no way of escape.

"I wish I could make you understand things, mother," he said desperately. "It isn't a question of liking or disliking, or even trusting a man. When he represents certain interests which may be of great advantage to you, why, you swallow any personal feeling, for the sake of the advantage. You must remember I've never had anybody to push me along; what I've done, I've done for myself. And there's a chance for me to make a pile of money in the next two years, if I decide to take it."

"'Twouldn't hurt anybody else?" asked his little mother. "And 'twouldn't take you away from Louise any more?"

He stared at her, unseeing, for a moment; then he laughed harshly, turning his eyes away from hers.

"That's not my lookout," he said, "as long as I don't get hurt myself. Somebody's bound to go under, always. The 'fortunes of war,'

you know. As for taking me away from Louise more, it might for a couple of years, but I should be able to give her all the money she wants; that ought to satisfy her."

His mother shook her head, smiling wistfully at him as he lounged in the big chair into which he had thrown himself, his hands clasped, rumpling his hair.

"No," she said, "that won't satisfy her, Henry. Don't you know how 'tis with women folks, dear? They've got to have something that's a little out o' their reach, to long for, and look forward to. If it can be the pride and honor that grow more and more all the time when the men they love are stepping higher and firmer, that's what they like best. It doesn't have to be prosperity always; it's just the place their men hold in other folks' minds and hearts. But if they can't have that, why they've got to have something else. Sometimes it's clothes, sometimes it's clubs, sometimes it's travel. Children — they're a great help of course, but you've got to keep things from them, till they're grown up. I know — I've seen it, up home, in three, four cases. And children don't fill the

man's place, even when women are 'most all mother. Louise must have been pretty when you married her, Henry."

"Why, she's pretty now," said her son, "don't you think so? When she's dressed for a party, and isn't too tired, I tell her there isn't one of the other women that can hold a candle to her. Look at her figure! She's like a girl of sixteen."

"So she is," said Grandma Willis; "don't you ever have little times together, just you and Louise — little home times, same as when you were first married?"

"We couldn't afford anything else then," said the man. "Louise would find it pretty stupid now, I reckon. Come on, mother, play me 'Money Musk.'"

That night when she had gone to bed, the bell rang, and her sharp ears caught the sound of the late caller's voice; it was Gorham Leeds. Next morning and for many mornings after, the hard look she dreaded to see in her son's eyes met her from across the breakfast table. Henry Willis spent little time at home until night came, but for most of every evening he was shut into

his den. Again and again his mother fell asleep with the sound of his footsteps in her ears, as he paced back and forth, back and forth. By day the look in his eyes repelled her; at night she could not even see him.

"It's lonesome," she confided to Nora one day, as she helped plan a suit for little Mike; the click of Nora's shears had drawn her to the kitchen. "The Sweetsers have gone to her folks in Ohio for a month, and Mrs. Raymond's got that new hospital on her hands, with a meeting 'most every day she *has* to go to; I went to one, but 'twas 'most too parliamentary for me. Folks are all kind as they can be, but they've all got things they belong to, here, same as I do, up home. Did you ever feel as if — as if you were just waiting for something to happen, Nora? Kind of notional?"

"M'm," said Nora, her mouth bristling with pins. "'Tis generally indigistion causes it."

Grandma Willis laughed in spite of her forebodings.

"'Tisn't my digestion that's the matter, whatever else it is," she said decidedly.

In the chill of the winter dawns she lay in bed,

shivering, her eyes wide open; but day after day went on and nothing happened. Malcolm ran in and out, bringing his boy friends to see her; they always shook hands cordially, but in a few minutes they were off again, and she was left alone. With all her simple friendliness she had too much dignity to spend her evenings in the kitchen, much as she longed for companionship.

"Nora'd think I was neglected, maybe," she said to herself as she sat in her window, the curtains pushed back, looking out into the night, after a silent dinner. "Henry wouldn't have me feel so, for the world; he doesn't *see* me, these days, that's all the trouble; his mind's somewhere else. Now where d'you s'pose that man's going with that little girl? She can't be more'n seven or eight by her size, and here 'tis 'most ten o'clock. Time she was abed and asleep. See her feet lag! Poor little thing!"

Suddenly she saw the face of Gorham Leeds as he passed under the great light. She shrank back to wait for his ring, which was answered by her son.

"If I only knew what I'm afraid of, I

shouldn't *be* so afraid," she told herself, shivering. "I wonder when he's coming to dinner."

At last she made up her mind that the dinner had been thrown out of her son's plans for some reason or other. One night she caught a scrap of conversation, when the door, evidently not as carefully closed as usual, swung open with a sudden draft.

"What's past is past," she heard her son's voice say, "I can't afford to be more squeamish than other men in my line of work. If Rathbone endorses it —" then the door was closed.

Next morning Henry Willis was determinedly jovial.

"If 'tweren't for his eyes I'd think he was happy," Grandma Willis told herself, as she listened to his tone of cheerful bluster and his frequent laugh.

"Pretty good-feeling day, I call this," he said when he and his mother were left alone at the table. "Wish I could go somewhere with you, but I've a lot of business on hand. See here, mother, I've been thinking over what you said awhile ago, and just to please you, I'm

going to run down and surprise Louise to-morrow, stay over a day or two, maybe three, let her trot me around to the places of interest, and bring Dorothy back with me. Mind you, I'm not admitting your ideas on the subject aren't nonsense, but — well, how would you like my doing that?"

"First-rate, boy, there's nothing I'd like any better," said Grandma Willis, the soft pink in her cheeks deepening with her pleasure.

"She doesn't seem to be feeling quite up to the mark," said her son, "and she really speaks as if she was a bit homesick — says something about — let's see —"

He drew a letter from his pocket and followed its course with his forefinger.

"Here it is," he said; "'Dorothy talks all the time about her grandmother; she compares everybody with her, always to their disadvantage. I have a feeling that she's weighed me and found me decidedly wanting. I've been trying to play some of the games her grandmother played with her, but I'm stupid about them.'"

"Lots of folks can't abide games," interpo-

lated Grandma Willis hastily. "Why, I'll have to write Dorothy!"

Her son smiled and lifted his finger.

"Silence in the Court," he said. "'You should have heard Dorothy the other day speak to another child who said, apropos of a very rich old woman who is here, "Don't you think old people are tiresome?" Dorothy looked at her with an expression of mixed pity and condescension. "I guess you'd never think that again if you knew my grandmother," she said. "Everybody loves her, and everybody wants her. I'm going back to see her just as soon as they'll let me!" That, if you please, from Dorothy! Can't you run down to take a look at this place? I'm well enough to show you all there is to see, which isn't much.'"

Grandma Willis's eyes were shining as she listened to him.

"There!" she said. "You see how 'tis; just as I told you. She wants you! She's got tired of the other folks, but you belong to her; that's what it comes to, always, unless folks have got too far apart. You and Louise haven't. You go right down there, soon as you can."

"There's one place at the back of her head she always says she won't let anybody touch but me," said Henry Willis, "not even the masseuse. Says my hand seems to fit it; always has from the time we were married; she's always had headaches. I guess that's it." He opened his big hand, and looked down at it, with a half-embarrassed laugh. "Perhaps she misses me a little, too," he said, "I'll find out."

After he had gone, Grandma Willis read again a note which had been brought to her that morning.

"My dear Mrs. Willis," ran the note, "I shall be glad to see you here at eight o'clock to-night. I have asked your friend, Judge Holcomb, who has promised to be here. I wish him to see that you, and your salve, have fair treatment at my hands.

"Yours truly,

"Ellen Rankin."

"Doesn't seem as if salve was of much consequence now," said Grandma Willis, with a little twisted smile as she held the note. "It

can't help my boy's hurt. If it only could! But there! he'll come out all right. There's One that'll look after 'Bijah's son, come what may. I musn't forget that."

Malcolm went off with Lester in the afternoon, to spend the night. When Henry Willis sat down to dinner, his jovial mood of the morning had vanished. He answered his mother in sullen monosyllables, till her innocent, perplexed questions died on her lips.

"I'm going out for awhile," he said when the silent meal was over, "don't sit up for me."

He flung on his coat and was out of the house before she had summoned courage to tell him of her own plans for the evening.

The place was wonderfully still; a thick falling snow deadened the out-door sounds. The clock gave its preliminary click before it struck the hour. She ran to the drawer in which lay her purse, took from it a key, and with shaking fingers unlocked the little drawer which held her treasures. From its wrapping she lifted the soft old hat and formed it into proper shape, the fashion of thirty years before. With little flying steps she carried it to the den. One light

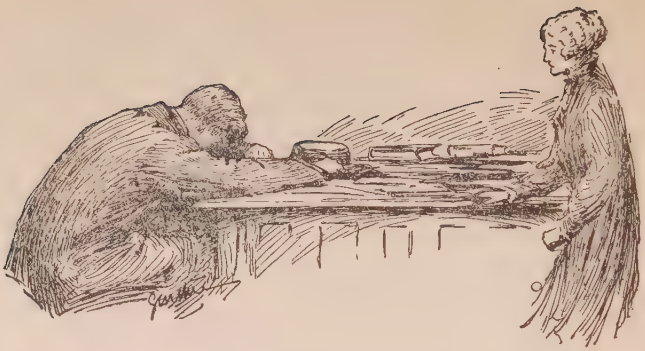
was always left burning, over the clumsy desk; she turned it out; on the desk, near a pile of papers, she laid the old hat, and stooping, touched its worn brim with her lips.

"You've always stood to my boy for a symbol of everything that's good and honest and true," she whispered; "I've heard him say so time and again. When he's looked at you he's seen his father's face — his father's eyes. This is his time o' need. Help him!"

She said a little wordless prayer as she smoothed the brim once more.

"That's the best I can do for you, boy," she said, catching her breath.

Softly she closed the door, and taking her key to the apartment from its hook she let herself out into the hall.



CHAPTER XVII

OUTSIDE the house, Henry Willis hesitated, as if uncertain which way to turn, and indeed it made little difference to him where he went, since he must carry his thoughts with him. He walked slowly to the corner, and stopped, his lowering gaze bent on the Park. As he stood there, Judge Holcomb came along, passed him, then turned back.

"Mr. Willis," he said in a tone of authority — "I have heard a rumor to-day which I trust is unfounded. A rumor that you have been offered, and are expected to accept, the office of president of the Landholme Mining Company."

His tone and manner as much as his words, roused the spirit of resentment which of late had slumbered.

"Why shouldn't it be offered me? and why shouldn't I accept it, Judge Holcomb?" demanded Henry Willis.

"You know well enough," said the judge sternly. "You know the way in which that company has acquired its holdings — only too well, I fear. As time has gone on, and you've apparently had no hand in the management of the mine, I have come to feel that the dishonorable part you played might have been the result of an undeveloped conscience, and unwise ambition. Since your mother's coming I have taken pains to find out all I could to your credit; you seem to have kept your hands fairly clean, in the midst of your success; don't soil them now. You're still a young man; make a high record for yourself and for those who will come after you. Don't break your mother's heart. Unavailing regret will make a sorry companion for your old age, Mr. Willis."

"Thank you for your advice," said Henry Willis coldly. "I must, I think, be allowed to

decide my own affairs without the assistance of outsiders. And as for my mother —" his face blazed with sudden wrath, "I'll look out for her. Good-evening, Judge Holcomb."

The judge stood for a moment, looking after the man as he plunged across the street, reckless of the hurrying motor-cars and carriages, the long coat hanging from his broad shoulders — a big, determined figure.

"A case of mistaken interest on my part," said the judge to himself. "The man is bound to take the wrong turning before long, unless —"

He was pondering over the unspoken possibility as he entered The Welford and a moment later was admitted to Mrs. Rankin's apartment.

"You see I am more than prompt," he said, as she rose to greet him. "The clock has not yet struck eight."

Mrs. Rankin motioned him to a chair and sank back into her own.

"Before Mrs. Willis comes, I want to tell you something, Judge Holcomb," she said. "You pretty nearly spoiled everything for your

friend in your fear that I wouldn't be just to her."

"I never feared that you wouldn't be just, madam," said the judge, the corners of his mouth twitching.

"Generous, then, if you like that better," she said with a dry smile. "I'm not obliged to have anything to do with her salve, and at first I had more than half a mind not to take it up, after you interfered."

The judge listened gravely. Mrs. Rankin leaned forward and spoke with sudden sharpness.

"You should have trusted me," she said; "you should have known that not even as hard-headed a woman as I could be calculating with her. She is to be my equal partner, in whatever gain comes from the salve, and the risk will all be mine — though there is no risk; the salve is good, and my agents will secure large sales for it. But I want to keep track of her; I don't want to lose her out of my life, now she's come into it. Man alive, don't you see it's her friendship I'm investing in, more than her salve?"

"I beg your pardon," said the judge. "I ought to have known. I've been very dull."

* * * * * *

Back and forth, back and forth, through the falling snow, paced Henry Willis. He took, unknowing, the path his mother loved best of all. The Park was deserted save for his lonely figure, and an occasional guardian of the peace. He did not heed the storm till he felt the chill of thick-lying snow through his coat; he had not even troubled to shake it off from time to time. For an hour he walked, his head dull and heavy, the same thoughts pressing over and over on his tired brain.

"Rathbone has been bought, with his foolish debts, and his wish to provide for that silly little wife. The best mining expert in this section of the country will be dead in six months; and he's been bought; bought by Gorham Leeds! He couldn't look me in the face and lie to me. The mine may hold out three years, no longer. I'm to be president for only two years, at a tremendous salary. That will secure enough new stockholders; people think I'm so keen. Well, I am

keen. I've had to be. Rathbone has been bought and I know it, but if he's right — he may be wrong — when the mine gives out people will say his mind was affected by his illness. Nobody will blame me. Mother'll never know. Rathbone's the best mining expert. His word will carry all the weight we need. That husband of the judge's cousin got good money for his land; more than *he* could ever have made out of it. Mother's ideas are all wrong. Any way, it wasn't my business to ask too many questions then. But this — I'm going into this with my eyes wide open. Rathbone's been bought! Well, what of it?"

Over and over again the words beat themselves out to the measure of his tread.

"I shall go mad if this keeps on," he said at last. "What is it I'm squirming about, after all? If I hadn't run up against Rathbone and his wife in the bank I'd never have known. Suppose the mine's all right? I'll go back to the house and send off my answer to-night. I'll manipulate this and put it through; then I'll take Louise and the children, and mother, if she'll go, off to Europe for a few years. I'd

like to see mother doing the continent, and hear her talk."

He straightened his shoulders, and leaving the Park, crossed the avenue to his home. He whistled as he entered the house, threw a word to Larry as he passed him, and went, still whistling, up the stairs, disdaining the elevator. As he let himself in at his own door, he called "Mother!" twice, but there was no answer.

"She's gone to bed early, worried over my glum fit, no doubt," he told himself. "Well, I shan't have any more. I've put all that behind me. Hello, I wonder who turned out the light above my desk."

He quickly pressed the electric button, and the light shone down on the old hat lying on his pile of papers. He stared at it for a moment.

"Father's hat," he said under his breath — "that's father's hat!"

Slowly, his hands clenching the edge of the desk, he sank into his chair. Then with a great sob, he put his head down on the old hat and his arms around it.

* * * * * *

The door of the den stood wide open, and Grandma Willis, coming in from the outer hall, saw the brilliant light; but no sound came from the room.

"You there, Henry?" she called softly. "I was over at Mrs. Rankin's, dear. She's planning about how she can help me help other folks with — Henry, Henry boy!"

She was on her knees beside him, slipping her arm around him, putting her little hand where his fingers would close over it.

"I had to come," she said. "I told them — Mrs. Rankin and Judge Holcomb — it might be a notion, but all at once I couldn't sit still there another minute! I was drawn home. I told them if I didn't come back they could fix it up. I'm right here; mother's right here, boy, and she'll stay till you tell her what's the matter."

It was half an hour later that in answer to a light pressure of the bell, she went to the door. Judge Holcomb, who stood there, a paper in his hand, hesitated as he looked into her wet, shining eyes. He read the change that half hour had wrought, and saw the look of courage born

of great love and sorrow in the sweet old face. While he hesitated she spoke, softly.

"I couldn't come back," she said; "you'll tell Mrs. Rankin, won't you? 'Twasn't that I didn't appreciate what she's doing, but I was drawn home," she said, her eyes looking straight up into his. "My son's been in great trouble o' mind. There's — there's been something in the past you and he haven't agreed on. You know about that. A young man wants money and loses sight of more important things. You know how that is, sometimes. I'm not trying to excuse him — only — that's the way it happened.

"But lately —" she caught her breath and went on again, "lately he's been tempted again. He says you know about that, too, only you don't know how bad 'twas — and I can't tell you, to-night."

"Don't tell me anything," said the judge huskily. "Dear friend, you must not torture yourself unnecessarily."

"Maybe I won't try to tell you," she said gratefully; "except this — Henry isn't ever going to be president of that company; he'll

write them so, to-morrow morning; and then he's going down South to see his wife and have a real talk with her, same as he's had with me. He isn't going to give her just outsides any more; it'll make a difference to her. Now I must go see if he's comfortable; I've got him in bed; he's 'most worn out. You please tell Mrs. Rankin I'll see her to-morrow, after Henry's gone. She's been so kind — and so has everybody; you most of all. I don't know what I'd have done without your help. But now, you understand, don't you? Now I've got to 'tend to my boy. Good-night."